LiCS

Literacy in Composition Studies

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LiCS MISSION STATEMENT

Literacy in Composition Studies is a refereed open access online journal that sponsors scholarly activity at the nexus of Literacy and Composition Studies. We foreground *literacy* and *composition* as our keywords because they do particular kinds of work. We want to retain Composition's complicated history as well as FYC's institutional location and articulation to secondary education. Through literacy, we denote practices that are both deeply context-bound and always ideological. Literacy and Composition are therefore contested terms that often mark where the struggles to define literate subjects and confer literacy's value are enacted. We are committed to publishing scholarship that explores literacy at its intersection with Composition's history, pedagogies, and interdisciplinary methods of inquiry.

Literacy is a fluid and contextual term. It can name a range of activities from fundamental knowledge about how to decode text to interpretive and communicative acts. Literacies are linked to know-how, to insider knowledge, and literacy is often a metaphor for the ability to navigate systems, cultures, and situations. At its heart, literacy is linked to interpretation—to reading the social environment and engaging and remaking that environment through communication. Orienting a Composition Studies journal around literacy prompts us to investigate the ways that writing is interpretive as well as persuasive; to analyze the connections and disconnections between writing and reading; and to examine the ways in which literacy acts on or constitutes the writer even as the writer seeks to act on or with others.

LiCS seeks submissions that interpret literacy at a time of radical transformation in its contexts and circulation. We are open to a wide range of research that takes up these issues, and we are especially interested in work that:

- provides provisional frameworks for theorizing literacy activities
- analyzes how literacy practices construct student, community, and other identities
- investigates the ways in which social, political, economic, and technological transformations produce, eliminate, or mediate literacy opportunities
- analyzes the processes whereby literacies are valued or legitimated
- examines the literacies sponsored through college writing courses and curricula, including the range of literate activities, practices, and pedagogies that shape and inform, enable and constrain writing
- considers the implications of institutional, state, or national policies on literacy learning and teaching, including the articulation of high schools and higher education
- proposes or creates opportunities for new interactions between Literacy and Composition Studies, especially those drawing on transnational and cross-cultural literacy research

Editors' Introduction to Issue 4.1

Issue 4.1 of *Literacy in Composition Studies* presents scholarship emphasizing new perspectives and new methodologies. Whether attending to methods the field must develop to analyze digital literacy practices more fully, looking at new archives to challenge how Black students have been represented in the open admissions movement of the 1960s and 1970s, or suggesting we apply a contact zones framework to analyze the systems of power at play in our research, this issue's three articles point toward the possibilities of deepening or shifting our methods to better study, analyze, and represent literate acts.

In "Methodological Changes to Researching Composing Processes in a New Literacy Context," Pamela Takayoshi draws on her extensive experience leading and directing digital literacy and digital writing research projects to explore the unique challenges that come with analyzing electronically mediated textual experiences. Focusing on how researchers of composition "have the potential to expand NLS [New Literacy Studies] scholarship in a significantly meaningful way," Takayoshi's article argues that researching literate practices in digital environments requires an attention to the composing processes that characterize fine-grained and systematic methodologies from Composition Studies (2). After briefly reviewing methodological challenges to digital literacy practices research, Takayoshi provides a much-needed overview of data collection and data analysis of digital literacy practices before taking on the ethical dimensions of research in digital environments. Using a Facebook study to illustrate her methods and orientations, Takayoshi's article expands both Composition Studies and Literacy Studies scholars' methodological knowledge by highlighting how to study writing in social, networked digital spaces.

In "Beyond Basic Reading and Writing: The People's House and the Political Literacy Education of the Student-Activists of the Black Liberation Front International, 1968-1975," Joy Karega complicates representations of Black students during this era that emphasize open admissions policies and basic writing instruction at the expense of acknowledging the complex political literacy practices that Black student activists undertook in extracurricular settings. Using archival research and oral history interview data, Karega outlines the rhetorical strategies, critical reading practices, and translingual production deployed by members of the Black Liberation Front International activists, acts which positioned The People's House "as a site of literacy education that often rivaled the university contexts where they were engaging literacy for academic purposes" (34). Karega argues that alternative academic sites provided Black students a training ground where they could "negotiate, define, and enact their political identities and practice literacy for political aims" (45).

In "Literacy Contact Zones: A Framework for Research," Nora McCook proposes that the concept of contact zones, which has been so generative for linguistics and composition, can function as a framework for conducting research on literacy. In a review of literacy studies research and the ways contact zones frameworks have been deployed in composition studies, McCook suggests that a model from one field can fill a gap in the other. A contact zones framework, McCook argues, makes language difference, orality, history, and power dynamics equally important to researchers; rather than enforcing binaries or tending toward reduction, "contact zones enable the complexities and

interrelations between these components of literacy to be visible" (67).

Alice Horning's Symposium essay, "Contingent Labor and the Impact on Teaching: Thoughts about the Indianapolis Resolution," articulates her support for and thinking about the Resolution. Horning argues that all faculty, including contingent and part-time instructors, should engage in compensated professional development to improve student learning through the teaching of reading.

Finally, in his review of Deborah Brandt's *The Rise of Writing: Redefining Mass Literacy*, Ryan Dippre responds to Brandt's analysis of how recent social, economic, and technological developments have given rise to mass writing. Dippre argues that Brandt's book is useful for teachers, researchers, and "individuals looking to examine their own development retrospectively as literate participants in society, as the shifts in mass literacy that Brandt describes are nothing less than tectonic and have shaped...the literate activity of the readers of [her] text" (78).

These authors expand how we understand theory, method, and representation in literacy and composition studies. We hope you find their contributions as valuable as we do.

Brenda Glascott, *California State University, San Bernardino*
Justin Lewis, *Virginia Tech*
Tara Lockhart, *San Francisco State University*
Holly Middleton, *High Point University*
Juli Parrish, *University of Denver*
Chris Warnick, *College of Charleston*

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Methodological Challenges to Researching Composing Processes in a New Literacy Context

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KEYWORDS

Research on literacy as a social practice of everyday life has contributed much to composition scholarship in its understanding of the larger contexts in which writing (and written composition) are situated. New Literacy Studies—which focuses on "the full range of cognitive, social, interactional, cultural, political, institutional, economic, moral, and historical" contexts for the study of literacy (Gee 2) —has paid systematic attention to the meaning-making activities of literate practice within complex social situations. In response to the earlier autonomous model of literacy, New Literacy Studies revealed literacy to be "part of a complex ideology, a set of specific practices constructed within a specific infrastructure and able to be learnt and assimilated only in relation to that ideology and infrastructure" (Street 180). A robust body of research has provided richly detailed theoretical and empirical understandings of literacy as a situated social practice, because as David Barton argues,

> to understand literacy, researchers need to observe literacy events as they happen in people's lives, in particular times and places. The fact that different literacies are associated with different domains of life means that this detailed observation needs to be going on in a variety of different settings, and also that findings from one setting cannot simply be generalized across contexts. Research needs first to be specific to a given domain, before making any general claims about literacy. (52)

Researchers interested in observing literacy events as they happen in people's digital lives face new challenges, however, in capturing and understanding what people *do* with literacy in online spaces and how those practices coalesce with lives offline. Increasingly, this understanding of digital literacy practices is relevant across all domains of people's lives (educational, civic, workplace, and social) and crucial to a fuller understanding of literacy and the broader social goals and cultural practices these literacy practices help to shape.

Methodologically, there has been a heavy emphasis on ethnographic studies in NLS research. This methodological homogeneity is of course intimately connected to the NLS

insistence that literacy be studied *as a local practice*. This research orientation was best supported through an ethnographic approach to literacy as it is practiced *in situ* (indeed, Brian Street's foundational NLS text, *Literacy in Theory and Practice,* is as much an argument about literacy methods as it is a theorizing of literacy as a socially situated practice). I believe that composition researchers have the potential to expand NLS scholarship in a significantly meaningful way by providing a needed piece of the literacy puzzle through our focus on composing processes situated within literate practices.[1] Ethnographic research has revealed the great variability of literacy throughout human experience, and at the same time, it has suggested the inadequacy of a singular methodological approach to capturing such a complexly and deeply situated practice of meaning making. While ethnographic approaches are good at capturing large cultural phenomenon

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and their significance and meaning for groups of people, composition studies researchers have paid more fine-grained, systematic attention to *the composing processes* of writers through a variety of research methods:

- think aloud protocols (Berkenkotter; Flower and Hayes, "Cognitive" and "Cognition"; Perl; Smagorinsky, "Writer's Knowledge"; Smagorinsky, Daigle, O'Donnell-Allen, and Bynum; Takayoshi)
- interviews (Faigley and Hansen; Miller; Odell and Goswami; Rose)
- observations (Berkenkotter and Murray; Castelló, Iñesta, and Corcelles; Haas Dyson; Jensen and DiTiberio; Pianko; Selzer)
- time-use diaries (Buck; Hart-Davidson; Pigg; Grabill et al.)
- multi-draft comparisons of texts (Collier; Flynn; Schwartz; Sommers)

In these studies, composition studies researchers have captured the composing processes of a diverse range of people: academic writers (including undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty), professional writers, and everyday writers.

This methodological variety provides a range of perspectives on literacy *as it is practiced.* An ethnographic understanding of literacy as a cultural phenomenon, coupled with composition studies' research on individual writers at the moment of composing, provides a richer understanding of literacy as a situated practice than either does alone. This coupling of methodological approaches may go some way toward addressing Deborah Brandt and Kate Clinton's contention that the localized study of literacy "created methodological and conceptual impasses that make it hard to account fully for the working of literacy in local contexts" (338). Drawing on the rich history of methodological approaches in composition studies, researchers might begin "to bring the 'thingness' of literacy into an ideological model" (Brandt and Clinton 256). Through a diversity of research approaches, literacy researchers might develop a richer understanding not only of how literacy practices construct communities and writers within those communities, but in turn, of how writers are using the "thingness' of literacy to construct the communities and their identities within those communities

through literacy. These methodological concerns are of utmost importance in this cultural moment of sweeping social, linguistic, and technological literacy transformations. Emerging and still-to-emerge writing technologies intersect with research on contemporary digital literacy composing processes in ways that require critical ethical and methodological decision making by literacy researchers at all stages of the research process (that is, at the research design, data collection, analysis, and representation stages). In this article, I articulate some of these serious challenges researchers face in examining contemporary practices of literacy. We currently know very little about the processes by which individuals are actually composing in digital writing environments. I argue that research on contemporary digital literacy composing processes provides a crucial and needed window onto literacy as a social practice, and, further, that such research poses unique methodological challenges for researchers.

Methodological Challenges of Digital Literacy Composing Processes

In the introduction to their wide-ranging collection on digital writing research methods, Heidi McKee and Danielle Nicole DeVoss argue that "[d]igital technologies and the people who use those technologies have changed the processes, products, and contexts for writing and the teaching of writing in dramatic ways—and at this cultural, historical, and intellectual moment, it is imperative that our research approaches, our methodologies, and our ethical understandings for researching adequately and appropriately address these changes in communication technologies" (11). Chapters in their collection address multiple practical as well as ethical issues that experienced researchers have negotiated in digital writing research, providing an introductory understanding of changes that will only continue to evolve; as Susan Herring has also recognized, "new media pose special methodological challenges" (51), particularly "the range of challenges raised by analysis of new media content, including issues of definition, sampling, and research ethics, and the often times innovative solutions found to address them" (48). As McKee, DeVoss, and Herring recognize, researchers of new media have often found little guidance for how to work practically, analytically, and ethically with emerging forms of communication, often being required to come up with "innovative solutions" to the challenges. Certainly any research practice is likely to involve innovative thinking in order to capture accurately the specific contextual nuances of the particular research question; however, there is currently little methodological guidance even for how to begin navigating the challenges of research design, field work, and analysis involving new media data. Very often, the innovative solutions adopted to address the challenges are not included in the report of research findings and conclusions. Through my work on several research projects, work with other researchers in graduate courses on research design and field methods, and more focused one-on-one work with dissertating researchers negotiating the challenges of new media projects, I have experienced and witnessed many of the challenges and innovative solutions that are essentially written out of the final representations to which audiences have access. In this article, I draw on multiple experiences researching new technologies and writing in writers' every day lives:

- My multi-year involvement on a research team investigating the composing of Facebook writers revealed that research on digital literacy composing can require the creative development of new data collection practices and analytic procedures for digital literacy composing process data. The eight-member Facebook research team[2] asked *How do writers compose in networked, multimodal, interactive social spaces for written communication?* Specifically, we were interested in what writers do when they write online, what writers think about the writing they do, and how writers engage with their audiences in the writing they do in interactive networked spaces. Over the course of two years, we collected and analyzed eight writers' processes of public and private writing in Facebook through screencasts (screen capture videos accompanied by the writer's think-aloud protocol), resulting in 21,298 word transcript from the think-aloud protocol data and an additional 15,000 words describing the screen capture.

- My multi-year involvement on a research team investigating instant messaging revealed that participant selection and participant consent can be a complicated matter in new media contexts, particularly as it involves what I discuss below as "peripheral participants." The IM project revealed the ephemeral characteristics of digital literacy composing that require researchers to create contextually derived methods of data collection and participant selection. The IM research team asked *What forms does the writing in IM take? What are writers doing to and with written language in IM?* Over the course of three years and many hours of face-to-face and virtually connected analytic discussions, our research team worked together to analyze, categorize, and make sense of 54 IM conversations involving 32,000 words of data set and ended up with a taxonomy of written language features.

- Over the last ten years, I have taught five sections of graduate courses in Research Design and Field Methods to fifty or so graduate students. These courses have allowed me the opportunity to read, think, and discuss with many careful thinkers the challenges of research practice. In these courses, I have been given the opportunity to dive deeply with an informed and curious team of beginning researchers into methodological theories and the practical shape and consequences of research (with students working as a whole-class research team on an authentic research question or working as individual researchers on their own self-defined research projects). Additionally, through directing 17 dissertations at two universities and serving on 57 dissertation committees at numerous universities, I have worked with researchers adopting a range of methodological approaches in many different research sites, with a variety of participant populations, through the lens of a diverse range of specific research questions. New researchers often, through their explorations of (what are to them) unfamiliar waters, uncover the challenging methodological moments where researchers must make kairotic decisions situated within the unique study. It is impossible to estimate the influence these beginning researchers and emerging scholars have had on my thinking about research, but it is important to acknowledge the tremendous influence they have had on my tacit understandings of research practice, many of which take explicit form in this article.

This "strategic contemplation" draws attention to the unseen ways in which this work (like so much research-based work) is "also embodied, grounded in the communities from which it emanates" (Royster and Kirsch 659). As Cressida Heyes and other feminist research methodologists have insisted, our personal commitments and experiences "are, as always, deeply intertwined with the structure of [our] arguments" (1096). A network of research projects, practices, and fellow researchers have tacitly and explicitly contributed to this article. Across these experiences, I have come to understand that research on digital literacy composing presents unique but not insurmountable methodological difficulties.

Many researchers have written about ethical quandaries experienced in the conduct of fieldwork (Bain and Nash; Halse and Honey; Jacobs-Huey, Powell and Takayoshi; Taylor and Rupp). However, little has been written about the ways composing technologies give rise to dissensus at the *research design* and *analysis* stages of research. Unlike the methodological challenges researchers might encounter in their work with people in the field (challenges that often arise from individual personality and human interaction), the challenges researchers face at the research design and data analysis stages arise as problems of the very process of researching online at the moment of composing.

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Using examples from these various research projects in which I have been involved, in this article, I focus on three unique concerns that digital literacy composing processes pose for researchers:

- At the research design stage, *data collection methods* must be assessed for how closely they capture composing processes;
- After these (often multimodal) data sets have been collected, researchers must attend to *composing analyzable data sets* of digital literacy composing.
- In analysis, researchers face the ethical problem of what to do with *unanticipated participants* and *peripheral data collection*.

These three methodological challenges are not ones uniquely arising from a particular study of a particular site; instead, they are challenges common to any research on digital composing. Describing these methodological challenges that researchers face, in the following sections, I provide some guidance for researchers in navigating these challenges.

Data Collection Methods for Capturing Digital Literacy Composing Processes

Researchers might collect data that is separate from the activity of composing (as in interviews and surveys that ask writers to talk about composing experiences they've had previously) or, at the other end of the spectrum, data that occurs more closely to the moment of composing (as in screen capture video that records the actions taken in a computer program or eye tracking videos that

record the participant's visual pathways). Thus, data collection methods aimed at understanding composing might be understood in terms of their proximity to the moment of composing as well as their ability to provide a more or less partial understanding (Figure 1).
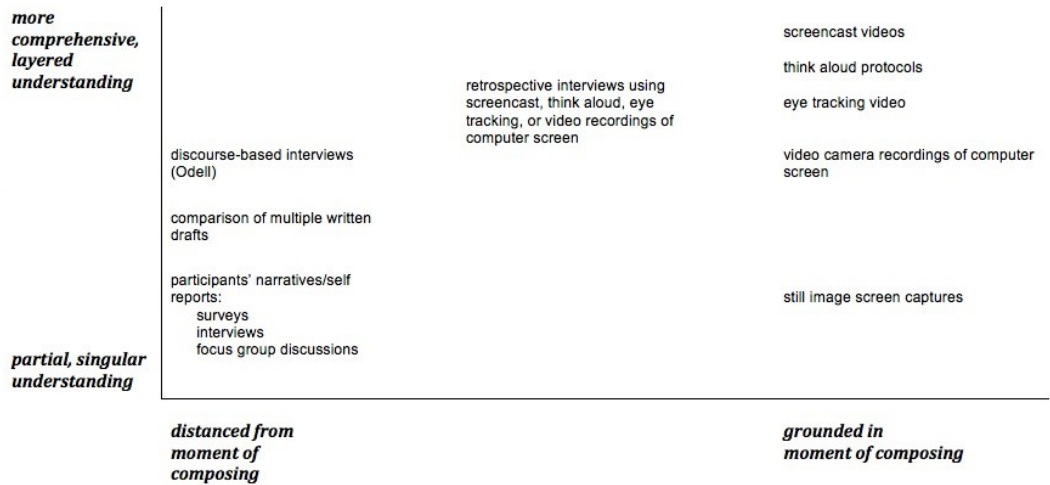

Figure 1. Proximity of data collection to moment of composing relative to the method's ability to provide a more or less partial understanding.

As this figure shows, in studies of digital literacy composing, data collection practices vary in terms of their proximity to the composing activity: from practices distanced from the moment of composing (surveys, interviews, focus groups, other forms of participants' self descriptions) to practices grounded in the moment of composing (think-aloud protocols, screencast videos, video recordings of computer windows, eye tracking videos) with numerous data collection methods between (screen captures, comparison of multiple written drafts, retrospective interviews grounded in think-alouds or video screencasts). Figure 1 shows that these data collection practices can be understood in terms of how nearly they move toward a comprehensive understanding of the writing process. The more one's study brings together multiple perspectives, the less partial and more detailed the understanding: while a survey alone can give a sense of what writers *think* or *report* they do when they write, coupling that partial understanding with screen captures or comparisons of written drafts can provide a measure of how closely a writer's understanding of her process and her actual composing practices match. Particularly with research located closer to the act of composing, research that combines methods (for example, screen capture or eye tracking with think-aloud or retrospective verbal protocols) can move toward a fuller (yet always impartial) understanding of what writers are doing and their decision making processes.

The increasing ubiquity of digital composing technologies allows contemporary researchers to situate their data collection close to the moment of composing. We are in the unique position historically to capture exactly what happens when writers write. In particular, screen shot and screen

capture programs provide an important view of the work writers undertake on computers. Screen shots of different stages in a composition allow us to see changes in compositions over time, and retrospective interviews focusing on those screen captures allow researchers to direct participants' reflections on particular moments in the composing process. Screen shots do not allow us to see *how* those changes took shape, however, in the way that screencast programs create a digital recording of changes over time on a computer screen made by a participant as she works (when coupled with a writer's audio narration, screencast recordings become even richer data sets). Recording a writer's think-aloud protocol as the soundtrack for the screencast video allows researchers to see the composition unfold as a movie and to have the composer's thinking synchronized to the particular stage in the process. Particularly with multimodal, digital literacy composing, a writer's descriptions of her writing process may serve as necessary but not sufficient data – composing with computers often moves so quickly that writers are unable to describe every detail, writers may not understand the significance of steps in their process that literacy researchers find meaningful, and a writers' description of her composing may not accurately communicate what is actually happening. As social theories of technology remind us, technologies work best when they are invisible.

A particularly rich example of this is a participant in the Facebook research project I described above. In his think-aloud screencast, Bill says "Maybe I should make a new profile picture" and then proceeds to select a photo from his Facebook photo album, import it into Adobe PhotoShop, and edit it into a practically new composition, while also continuing two chat conversations and checking his Facebook Wall as notifications alert him to new postings. With breathtaking speed and facility, Bill completes 99 unique commands in just seven minutes—from the relatively straightforward process of selecting a photo to the more complicated and multilayered processes of editing the photo, all involving their own series of cursor movements, selections, and commands. After opening a new file in Photoshop, Bill copies the selected image from Facebook into Photoshop, selects the part of the image he wants to retain, changes the image hue, blurs the image, changes the lighting of the image, writes "Cold Chillin" on a new Photoshop layer so it is imposed onto the image, justifies and edits the font of the text, saves the image, copies the image from Photoshop back into Facebook, and tags the five people in the photo. Within each of these composing acts, Bill makes numerous decisions and completes multiple commands, announcing with finality "Done" once the photo has been published as his profile picture and people in the photo tagged.

Behind this writer's rumination that "Maybe I should make a new profile picture" are nearly a hundred unidentified processes involved in the composing that would be elided in a comparison of the final products (i.e., the original and final edited profile photos). Significantly, even Bill's think-aloud protocol alone barely begins to capture the discrete steps involved in the composing process. His think-aloud protocol references his thinking in only the broadest terms: "put it left of the line. Get a better font. Something more bold and in your face. Arial Black." In the retrospective interview (focused on specific moments in the screencast), when asked if he had a plan for the photo before he started editing it, Bill says,

> Usually when I'm editing a photo for a profile picture, I, sometimes I'll have something in
> mind and I'll think through like how I'm going to do it, and then I'll do it. And then

> sometimes, it's just like, I'll just open up Photoshop and start doing random things, and like, 'Oh, that turned out good.' And I'll use it. …. I just know different things will make different effects so I just started doing them. I didn't have anything in mind for it when I did this.

Bill suggests that sometimes he has a plan before he begins the composing and editing of his profile picture, but that in this case, he didn't have anything in mind when undertaking the 99 commands (the "random things" he did) to compose his profile picture. Bill's expertise with Photoshop may mask for him the complexity of the steps he undertakes in editing the photo. When he's asked how he keeps all the multiple actions straight while he's moving through them at such speed, he replies, "Well, I've been doing this for a long time. I can't explain that any other way. I mean, I've worked with computers since I was like eight." In both his think-aloud and his retrospective interview, Bill's descriptions of his process very much downplay its complexity. It

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is only through having a multi-tiered data set—think-aloud, screencast, and focused retrospective interview—that researchers can begin to see the complexity of his composing process. If we are to understand digital literacy composing, researchers need ways to capture, analyze, and represent the multiple modes of composing with an awareness of how those different modes of composing relate to and intersect with one another.

As Bill's case shows also shows, as with any research question, certain forms of data and data collection are more apt than others for answering particular research questions. Data collection separated from the moment of composing is more appropriate for studies of writers' attitudes toward and beliefs about their digital literacy composing: such data collection methods focus on writers' self assessment and do not capture what writers actually do in the act of writing. On the other hand, data collected more closely to (and during) the moment of composing is more fitting for studies not on writers' perceptions but on the activities in a writer's processes (some of which may be tacit, as they are for Bill, and thus unrecognized by the writer). Cheryl Geisler and Sean Slattery suggest that for literacy researchers committed to "process tracing" (that is, capturing writing processes in the moment of composing), video screen capture provides a way of recording and understanding the complexity of moment-by-moment composing in digital environments: "Video screen capture has thus made visible phenomena that might otherwise have gone unnoticed in digital writing" (187). Making visible what has "gone unnoticed in digital writing" can meaningfully add to a well-begun understanding of what writers say and think about their processes by providing a window onto what they actually do when they compose—what types of planning take place, how drafting proceeds, when revision occurs, how writers move between different composing programs, what instigates that movement, and myriad other composing process questions that remain unexplored. This research requires contextual decision-making about how researchers will capture writers' composing processes (through hard copies of stages in a process, still screen capture images, screen capture video, screencasts, think-aloud protocols, retrospective interviews, or some combination

of these methods) as well as how these various modes of data combine to create a picture of digital literacy composing. In the following section, I discuss the reliable construction of multilayered data representations of composing processes.

Composing Analyzable Data Sets of Digital Literacy Composing Processes

The process of ordering data, of course, occurs throughout the entire research process: from the research question and design we first articulate (in which we choose our question and design, filtering out other possibilities) to the data collection (in which we do not—cannot—capture every detail but focus on what is most pertinent) to the ordering of collected data into a manageable form which can be systematically analyzed (the arrangement, and repeated rearrangement, of disordered data into a coherent form destined to be categories of meaning and analysis). The first step in creating an accurate representation almost always involves some form of transcription or ordering of written data, and ordering and transcribing collected data into a manageable form is more than mere labor in preparation for analysis. Instead, transcription is the first step in the analytical writing process; it is the first act of writing in that researchers are translating into written language our interpretation of the raw data.

Describing transcription as "an interpretive process and as a representational process," Judith Green, Maria Franquiz, and Carol Dixon point out that "a transcript is a text that 're'-presents an event; it is not the event itself. Following this logic, what is re-presented is data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose, not just talk written down" (172). The researcher, in other words, shapes the data through the act of transcription. Very often, though, transcription is treated as a mechanical matter of merely translating oral data into written form. I believe that it is important to interrogate transcription as an interpretive act of writing because as researchers well know, writing functions as a mediational means and constructs as well as captures "reality."

The transcription stage in the research process is often idiosyncratic because the raw and constructed data are usually only seen by the researcher (or if she's on a research team, her colleagues; or if he's writing a dissertation, perhaps his dissertation director). The goal for creating a coherent data set is making the raw data manageable and analyzable—that is, getting the raw data into a form that allows for analysis of it. Add to this the complexity of multimodal (or extra linguistic) data and the transcription of data becomes complex, with little published scholarship available to guide researchers' decision making. The construction of multimodal data sets often involves researchers of multimodal composing processes thinking creatively and carefully about what data they want to analyze, the relationships between the multiple modes of data, and what needs to be represented about those modes and relationships.

While the transcription (nailing down of a moment in time) of sound and image may be easily guided by existing models of transcription, video and particularly its corresponding recording of movement present new methodological challenges. In a multimodal environment, for example, cursors move rapidly as users navigate through a single screen, screens move up and down as users

scroll through pages in a program, programs layer one on top of the other as users move between multiple open programs, and written utterances are recursively composed with letters entered, deleted, entered again. Developing a transcription system that renders audio (think-aloud) and visual (screen capture) data into a coherent, linguistic form was crucial for the Facebook team's movement from raw data to codifiable data set. As Figure 2 demonstrates, capturing and codifying a writer's composing in Facebook involved transcribing two types of data: verbal think-aloud protocols and visual screen capture video. Either one alone would provide a partial (and likely, confusing) picture of the complexities of reading, writing, navigating, responding, initiating, and reflecting involved in composing in the multimodal and multilayered technological world of Facebook. As Figure 2 shows, transcribing the process involved transcribing the audio data of the think-aloud protocol in synchronization with the video data of the screen capture.

Analysis notes	Time	Visual Data	Verbal Data
	0:00	email open on screen + Firefox browser: University Registrar page open + *Screenflow* Downloads – *Telestream* + web address box: Facebook.com + Facebook opens	Ok so I am going to use FB for twenty minutes. [laughs] So I was uh just checking uh when I could register for classes. Looks like I'm going to have to wait til November 1st. That sucks.
		Cursor on *Tom Bramwell*: "Spencer is going pretty hard with the beats." +Comment box. lame. + Comment.	Ugh. Tommy. Spencer, Spencer's lame. That's just a fact.
		Cursor moves across screen. +1 event invitation + Events.	I wish FB would tell me who invites me to events. It used to but now it's just dumb. So I like have to go all the way over here to "events"
		Cursor on event (*Scorpion* Fest) then on Dan Williams + Respond. + Not Attending. + RSVP.	and *then* I see Dan Williams invited me. And that's a dude I went with high school with that I don't even really know, so it's going to be a "not attending."
		+ *Chris Bess* under *Birthdays* heading of *Events* page. + Firefox. Twi (auto complete URL menu drops down) + Twitter website + pulldown menu in Twitter. ↓ + sign out [[another user name?]]	Who's birthd – ? Chris Bess's birthday is today? No…uh, I think I'm gonna to have to wish him happy birthday on Twitter real quick. Which I guess technically is uh you know still writing, so I think that works.
		Twitter Home page. + *Sign in* + djfatrax from menu of user names [[appears to have 3 different twitter names]]. + password box: XXXXXXX + *Sign in*. Twitter feed opens.	I'll use my deejay name that I use for State University radio…so I can sound *cooler* right? Chris Bess is christheripper
		+ *Comment box*. @Chris345 [d: 5] 6 HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHRIS, KEEP THE DOPE TRX COMIN #HOTRAP+*Tweet*.	Happy Birthday Chris. Keep the uh, uh uh let's see what should I say, uh, keep the dope trax comin uh hotraps. That's the name of one of his songs that I really like. Twitter's pretty dope so yeah. Well that's cool. What else is going on?

Figure 2. Screencast transcription.

Our synchronization of the visual and audio data is an example of the ideological shaping of our data set in relationship to our research objective: developing a data-rich picture of writers composing in Facebook. Our emphasis was on the composing process, not the textual products as they evolved over time, and so we had to account for the keystrokes to accurately capture all that writers did when they wrote using their computers. We needed to capture the specific actions participants made in the interface as well as their thoughts about those actions. Additionally, as capturing the writers' movement in the environment is crucial to understanding the composing going on there, our research team was faced with developing a way of linguistically capturing cursor movement, the selection of interactive buttons and links, movement of the screen (as the composer scrolled up and down reading through the page), movement between parts of the interface (from Wall post to private

chat, for example), and the production of written text.

Once we had agreed upon a consistent form for transcribing the data, we transcribed the data (approximately 36,000 transcribed words total; 21,000 in the think-aloud protocols alone), with every transcription in the Facebook project reviewed by another team member. This second round of transcription allowed us to catch inaccuracies, misinterpretations, and details that the original transcriber missed, because as Kristen L. Easton, Judith Fry McCormish, and Rifka Greenberg recognize, "As a general rule, just as an analysis can only be as accurate as the person doing it, so also is a transcription only as precise as the person transcribing. Having people on the team who are invested in the project and committed to accuracy at every phase is essential to the integrity of the study and necessary for establishing dependability and confirmability" (707). The second round of transcription sometimes led to revisions in the transcriptions that significantly altered the meaning, but more importantly, having the transcriptions reviewed worked much the way interrater reliability measures the reliability with which the data can be understood in the way it was understood by the initial researcher. If we believe that transcriptions are the first analytical step in a research project, producing the first written form of the data, then it makes sense that even at this early stage in the research process, we build in measures of accountability and reliability. Theories of reliability suggest that a measure (or in this case, an interpretation in the shape of a transcription of data) is considered reliable if it gives the same result over and over again, particularly from the perspective of multiple people (or raters). Rather than seeing a second round of transcription as a corrective for accurate transcription, we might instead understand this second round of transcription as a check for reliability of the important first stage of analysis (thus shifting our conception of transcriptions from technical, lower order skill to analytic, meaning-making work).

Multimodal data sets such as screencasts require that researchers not lose sight of the uniquely and definitively multimodal nature of the data. Researchers cannot rely solely on the linguistic rendering but must always be moving back and forth between visual and verbal data. The linguistic rendering is not about meaning but about methodological process: it is not a more accurate rendering of the phenomenon but rather a methodological necessity. By creating a linguistic re-representation of the verbal and the visual, we create a workspace where we can begin to identify what happens, what's interesting, how the verbal and visual are interlocked, and the patterns that exist in the data. All the way through that process of understanding, though, researchers need to be moving back and forth between the linguistic visual/verbal transcript and the video data in order to not lose sight of the essence and features of the visual data and to not mistakenly let the linguistic stand in place of the visual.

> *"Multimodal data sets such as screencasts require that researchers not lose sight of the uniquely and definitively multimodal nature of the data."*

Unanticipated Participants and Peripheral Data

In addition to being attendant to data collection and constructing a reliable data set, researchers must pay careful attention to ethical issues involving research participants and consent. Increasingly,

literacy in online space is intensely interactive, as people collaboratively write the digital space, slipping seamlessly back and forth between writer and audience roles. The intertextual nature of literacy, as well as the numbers of people dispersed through time and space, create a likewise amorphously bounded research population. Research on composing practices in interactive social networked spaces involve researchers in a web of potential participants as singular writers interact synchronously as well as asynchronously with multiple other writers.

In methodological theory and research design guidebooks, participants in qualitative research have largely been assumed to be identifiable people the researcher has chosen to participate. Research on literacy as a social practice, however, expands the boundaries of the activity of writing, though. Whereas studies of composing processes in the 1980s were somewhat naturally bounded by the writing space and text the singular writer produced in isolation, contemporary literate practices are often networked and interactive, involving identifiable groups of people as well as innumerable, unidentified "publics." For example, in the Instant Messaging study, we were interested in examining and identifying the forms of the writing being produced in IM, which at the time of data collection was a relatively new phenomenon, largely used by young people. In order to identify the features of the writing as it existed *in situ*, an important feature of that study was the collection of *naturally-occurring* IM conversations. In our study, to eliminate the possibility of participants composing IM transcripts with a university language researcher audience in mind, we asked participants to provide transcripts that pre-dated our invitation to participate in the study.

> *"Research on composing practices in interactive social networked spaces involve researchers in a web of potential participants as singular writers interact synchronously as well as asynchronously with multiple other writers."*

Participants in the IM study gave consent, captured and emailed transcripts of their IM conversations to our research team, and we stripped the transcripts of proper names, identifying speakers as "male," "female," male2," or "female2" in order to keep track of speakers (see Figure 3). In doing so, we were in compliance with our Institutional Review Board (IRB), that required signed consent forms and confidentiality for participants through the use of pseudonyms. This meant, for example, that Male 9 in Figure 2 gave his consent and then captured and emailed the transcript of this conversation with Male 10 to our research team. At some point well into the data analysis, we realized that while our study had IRB approval and we had obtained consent from participants who shared transcripts with us, our study involved participants we had not anticipated – not just those whose consent we had (for example, Male 9) but also people (Male 10) with whom we did not have any contact. Our specific decision to focus on retroactive discussions in order to capture naturally-occurring data (a key feature of our research design) resulted in the inclusion of what I've come think of as "unanticipated participants" – people situated within the communicative context who are not our primary research focus but who are involved unintentionally or unexpectedly through their networked connection to the identified, consenting participant.

Likewise, in the Facebook study, individuals gave consent for the use of their think-aloud screencasts as they engaged in literate practices in Facebook. Consenting participants allowed us access to more than just their process of composing when they provided us with the screencasts,

Male 9: so ur coming to the game right?

Male 10: yup

Male 9: sweet

Male 10: 😊

Male 10: i thought u would be out partyin with the rest of kent

Male 9: haha no

Male 10: o is cash there w/ u?

Male 9: nope

Male 9: im all alone

Male 9: on his comp

Male 9: hes out w/ kristy

Male 10: haha, i shoulve guessed

Male 9: yeah hes taking her out today sine he ant on alentine's day

Male 10: ohh really?

Figure 3. Instant messaging trascript.

though—the screencasts showed the participant's Facebook profile and wall, including the images and names of the friends with whom they were connected—people with whom, again, we the researchers had no contact. One individual's Facebook Wall is networked with many other people's names, images, writing, and other identifying features. These unanticipated others had not provided consent or been informed by our research team that their FB writing was being captured for our study. The number of unanticipated others in a study such as one focused on social networking can be quite significant: In just 10 seconds of one FB participant's screencast, over 65 unique unanticipated participants are identifiable by name (with about a fourth of those identifiable by an accompanying image of them).

Participant selection in qualitative research has often been treated as a fairly straightforward process of identifying human participants whose experience or behavior can provide answers to the research question. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman suggest that "Decisions about sampling people and events are made concurrently with decisions about the specific data collection methods to be used and should be thought through in advance" (105). The IM and FB research teams both made decisions about sample populations concurrently with decisions about the specific data collection methods, in particular in terms of how both the data collection and the participant sample would provide insight into the research questions. The entwined, amorphous nature of the internetworked environments in which the participants wrote, and the precision with which the data collection method captured in detail all those who participated in those environments, challenged our ability on both teams to think through the participant population in advance.

Increasingly, it is impossible to understand literacy as an isolated activity; as the examples above reveal quite strikingly, literacy is at even the most basic level very much a social practice. Individual writers' processes and texts are more and more entwined with other people's writing. Indeed, as writers increasingly engage in literacy in interactive digital spaces that bring together complex and vast networks of other participants, unanticipated participants are increasingly present, and researchers are faced with equally complicated decisions about sampling, participant selection, and consent. Studies of composing processes easily might have been bounded at one time by a focus on a single individual writing with a pen and paper, but contemporary forms of writing are not so easily bounded, as writers engaging in virtually every form of writing (from completing forms to communicating in 140 characters with a real identifiable audience to writing essayist compositions) are entangled in sometimes vast networks of other writers, other texts, and other composing processes. Studies of contemporary literacy processes, thus, push on the bounds of what we mean by "research participant" and the limits of consent in our research. Similarly, as I discuss in the following section, these challenges of consent and peripheral boundaries arise when researchers capture composing processes and discover they have inadvertently captured peripheral data.

Another significant ethical issue facing researchers studying digital literacy composing involves the ways digital data capture practices complicate issues of privacy and consent. Parallel to the ways digital research can unintentionally involve unanticipated participants, digital research can likewise unintentionally involve peripheral data—data that is captured within the larger context of the composing environment but that is peripheral to the data the researcher has set out to collect. Participants may give their consent for us to observe and record their individual literacy activities, but in a networked, digital world, those activities rarely stand alone as individual, isolated pieces of text. Instead, literacy in a networked world is increasingly interactive and dependent on the participation of others in constructing the text. For researchers, this can complicate how data is collected (and in particular, how it is bounded).

Work on the Facebook research team made visible the nature of these complications, particularly in terms of what informed consent might involve in a digital age. Our eight participants' signed consent forms informed them that we would be recording their processes using a screen capture program and that in future publications or presentations, we might include screen-captured images of their computer screens. During the data analysis phase of our research, I became interested in describing the idiosyncratic process of navigating the Facebook interface; participants seemed to have developed their own unique and slightly different ways of opening new links, moving around among Facebook's different elements, and accessing the Facebook interface. I went through each of the participants' screen capture videos to identify how they entered into the Facebook site: some had Facebook as their default page, some had a bookmark on their menu bar, and some typed "Facebook" into their URL bar. In the latter case, participants need not even enter the whole word "Facebook": typing in the initial letters prompted Google to auto-complete the whole word. When they did that, the URL locator bar dropped down a history of recently visited and bookmarked sites that shared the initial letters that were entered. The image in Figure 4 is a screen capture of one moment (literally a split second) in which one participant, George, entered "f" in the URL locator bar that prompted

Google to auto complete for "Facebook."

Figure 4. Facebook screen capture.

Pausing the screencast video to see how users enter the Facebook interface revealed some interesting things about participants' uses of Facebook—for example, in the case of George, the fact that entering "f" into the URL bar prompted Google to auto-complete with "Facebook" suggests that Facebook is cached as this writer's most frequently visited Web site with an "f" in it. Additionally, although in his recording sessions for our project George stayed on his Facebook Newsfeed page without navigating to any other pages, the links listed under "History" suggest that he *had* navigated to specific people's Facebook pages (those names have been redacted in Figure 3). The screen capture images suggest, that is, that George's data recording session for our project might have been shaped with his sense of the researcher over his shoulder. However, pausing the screen capture also revealed some things George might not have anticipated or guessed that same researcher would see. As Figure 3 shows, George's bookmarks include "huge-cum-shot-facials.com." Although the screen captures make readily apparent these details of George's use of Google, George's movement in the program was so quick that it's easy to wonder if George was aware—in the literal split second it flashed on the screen—that the porn bookmark appeared in the screen capture he recorded for us. In our introduction of the study to participants, we had explained the screencast process; indeed, we'd had brief training sessions teaching participants how to use the screen capture and audio recording program. We had described potential uses for the data, although until we were immersed in the data analysis stage (long after the data had been collected and transcribed) we ourselves had not realized the peripheral data participants might be providing us through their screencast, including: programs on their desktops, filenames, web sites visited and bookmarked, user names, as well as the names, user ids, and images of others in their network.

The personally revealing data George shared was peripheral to our research questions, and while potentially embarrassing, it is a relatively innocuous example suggestive of the possibilities for more serious instances of participants revealing information they expect to be private. For example, if peripheral data revealed a participant's involvement in criminal activity or suggested a participant at risk of harm to self or other, such information would have to be acted upon by the researcher (at the least, researchers experiencing unanticipated problems or adverse effects are required to report them

to the IRB that initially approved the study).

The Belmont Report, which IRB committees use as a basis for human subjects research, requires researchers to enact respect for persons through informed consent, which, in part, describes for participants how their privacy will be protected. While our research team carefully planned for safeguards to do this, and our IRB approved our study, our research team learned that while screencasting captures composing processes in a rich way like no other data collection method, it also came with significant and unforeseen ethical complications. As Geisler and Slattery warn, "[b]ecause screen-capture software records all documents and interfaces as they appear on-screen, the data set may be replete with confidential information. The need to protect such information may mean that data must be carefully protected and any data to appear in a publication must be carefully screened and identifying information changed" (199). Even when researchers carefully protect information through the existing practices with which we've traditionally ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants, though, the confidential information appearing in a screen-capture data set raises new and complicated ethical issues.

Kairos and Strategies for Studying Digital Literacy Composing Practices

James Paul Gee has described the network of forces involved in what he calls Discourse with a capital D: "distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities" (152). In this understanding, literacy is not the centerpiece of social activity but instead an activity often accompanied by ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing. What is important about literacy is the ways it is used "so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities." To account for literacy as a social practice of meaning making, we need accounts that capture these many ways of being in the world with written language, as well as accounts that capture what it is people actually do in the moment of composing the products of literate interaction.

Ellen Barton has argued that "[t]o an empirical researcher, the field of composition today seems dangerously near to losing whole types and areas of research questions, particularly questions of an empirical nature. Fewer and fewer studies, it seems, ask questions about how people think and write, about how people compose in real time, or about how groups of people write, traditionally topics that are investigated in empirical studies" (407). The kinds of research questions Barton suggests are ones that I wholeheartedly agree are necessary for understanding the ways people are composing and using literacy across their lives with contemporary technologies. Contemporary composing processes—involving new technological contexts, composing and design tools that situate the written word as one mode among many, and expanded and public networks of audiences—pose a special challenge as an object of study across the whole of the research process (from the kinds of research questions

we pose, through the research design and data collection to the analysis and finalizing of a data-based argument). These challenges are likely to continue to push on existing research practices and require new strategies for research. I have suggested here some of the challenges I have experienced in researching digital literacy composing, but as with any research undertaking, it's impossible to foresee and plan for every challenge.

Literacy researchers may navigate these challenges by developing a heightened sense of the kairotic decision-making Katrina Powell and I suggest researchers rely on particularly when navigating ethical waters. We describe kairos as "a contextually bound principle that determines appropriate and right truth only through a consideration of the rhetorical situation [because] appropriateness can be determined only within the moment, only within the context of the research process, only with the involvement of participants and the research site" (Powell and Takayoshi 415). A key component of kairos is being prepared to engage in moments of dissensus. Although researchers cannot be prepared for every specific challenge arising from the unique circumstance of their research project, they can prepare for the possibility of kairotic decision making by being always watchful for moments of dissensus and vigilant about the ethical challenges that can arise at any stage in the process.

"Although researchers cannot be prepared for every specific challenge arising from the unique circumstance of their research project, they can prepare for the possibility of kairotic decision making by being always watchful for moments of dissensus and vigilant about the ethical challenges that can arise at any stage in the process."

Be watchful for moments of dissensus. When facing a methodological challenge (of the kind I describe in this article, for example), a researcher might immediately search for a solution so she can quickly move on. But I believe the moments of dissensus are worth pausing over, probing, and examining. Exploring the implications of the conflict for what can be known, what can be said, and what can be used in answering the research question is ethically imperative and empirically responsible. By recognizing that there are likely to be moments of dissensus and by being watchful for those moments, researchers can be prepared to probe those moments and make them into productive moments of learning and deeper understanding. Likewise, researchers might be prepared for negotiating instances of dissensus "in the moment." Especially when researching digital literacy composing, researchers are likely to be challenged to make decisions unique to the research context. With few studies of digital literacy composing as models and little methodological theory to guide them, researchers might adopt an explicitly recursive approach to research design, recognizing that as one encounters challenges, the researcher may need to revise her research design or the conduct of the research.

Reflective methodological narratives from literacy researchers provide one significant pathway for being prepared to navigate methodological and ethical challenges in the conduct of research on composing processes. I believe we need more of these narratives of the decision making process by researchers in the field. Reflecting on his experiences as an empirical researcher, Jeffrey Grabill has written, "As a less-experienced researcher, I used to worry that my own practices did not measure up to the idealized practices articulated in methodological literatures. This is a useful worry. But

I also think it is important to provide more nuanced accounts of research practice so that we can become vigilant but not anxious researchers" (218). I, too, share Grabill's belief that although the challenges of methodology are often left out of the orderly narratives of research studies, researchers can learn from the experiences of researchers before us who have negotiated and built responses to those challenges. Even in research articles that focus on a student's results rather than researcher's narratives of practice, however, we can pay "greater attention to accounts of research method, both for the reader's sake and the writer's" (Smagorinsky, "The Method" 394). Especially with respect to newly developing literate practices, greater attention to research methods and practices is a significant first step in developing methods which ethically and accurately capture these new practices.

    <u>Be vigilant about the ethical challenges.</u> Researchers of contemporary composing processes need to be prepared for ethical issues to arise at any and every stage in the process—ethics are not just a matter of human subjects' relationships but a matter of consequence across the entire research process. Heidi McKee and James Porter see research ethics not as something static addressed at the beginning of the research process or left only to the oversight of those outside the process (like IRB boards) but as "a continuous process of inquiry, interaction, and critique throughout an entire research study, one involving regular checking and critique; interaction and communication with various communities; and heuristic, self-introspective challenging of one's assumptions, theories, designs, and practices" (739). This awareness of one's assumptions, theories, designs, and practices as they relate to research ethics connects to a larger call for self-reflexivity and an awareness of how one's interpretive, knowledge making, and analytic processes interact with and shape the research project as a whole. It is the responsibility of researchers to enact ethical practices as they arise in the study regardless of IRB approval. As Marshall and Rossman note, "Ethical practice is ongoing; obtaining a signature on an informed consent form is merely one observable indicator of the researcher's sensitivity" (48). Realizing that ethical concerns involving the varying expectations of privacy by participants and peripheral participants are very context-dependent, there is no algorithm that addresses how participants and peripheral participants might be selected for digital literacy composing research. Instead, the complexity of these ethical issues underscores the importance of thinking carefully about ethical matters at every stage in digital literacy composing research design. Ethical matters are not merely a matter of how we work with human participants or how we represent them in our final manuscripts. With digital literacy composing research (especially research located closely to the moment of composing as suggested in Figure 1), researchers are faced with ethical decision making at every stage of the research design.

    For example, the complications that arise from the range of peripheral data present in screencasts and screen captures might require researchers to enact specific practices to inform participants about the potential peripheral information captured in screencast and screen capture data. In addition to describing for participants the potential forms the data might take (in terms of presentations and publications), we might describe for participants the processes by which data might be analyzed prior to the final representational form, showing them how screen recording technologies might be used. New research practices might also involve being explicit in our consent forms about the analytic processes unique to video screen capture (including the researcher's ability to view screens

and actions repeatedly, to pause and capture fleeting moments, to encounter information about participants in the environment who are peripheral to the writing process, and to collect data about others with whom the participant interacts).

In a digital world, literacy is fully and meaningfully present across people's lifeworlds. Composition studies has recognized the wide-ranging functions of writing, the meanings these acts of written communication have for writers, and the importance for writing researchers and teachers of understanding those functions and values for literacy in people's lives as learners, workers, and citizens. Increasingly, we as a field have come to understand that much of this writing is being composed in digital, networked, and interactive writing spaces. Arguing that digital literacy composing processes present unique challenges for researchers investigating digital literacy composing, in this article, I have offered guidance for handling some of those challenges. This of course is just an opening move; as researchers immerse themselves in the study of digital literacy composing processes and practices as they are mediated in contemporary writing spaces, our disciplinary understanding of what it means to develop reliable, ethical research practices will certainly only expand.

NOTES

[1] The research team began in a graduate "Research Design" seminar; research team members were [names redacted]. Students in the course worked as a whole team to design an authentic study investigating some writing studies question. The class (including the instructor) worked more as a research team and less as a seminar. For example, the work that needed to be accomplished (as opposed to a teacher-set syllabus) determined the meetings and deadlines, and members of the team conducted a variety of types of work (as opposed to everyone doing their own IRB form or literature review, for example).

[2] Whereas composition studies scholars regularly cite NLS scholars in their written scholarship, the reverse is very rarely true—the rich body of composition studies scholarship is practically invisible in NLS scholarship. I believe the body of scholarship in composition studies provides an important and under-explored aspect of what writers do when they write to the broader context of literacy studies.

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Beyond Basic Reading and Writing:
The People's House and the Political Literacy Education of the Student-Activists of the Black Liberation Front International, 1968-1975

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KEYWORDS

political literacy, Black students, translingualism, critical reading, collaborative writing

Jacqueline Jones-Royster and Jean C. Williams have critiqued trends in rhetoric and composition that have reinforced what they describe as "a deepening sense that African Americans entered the university during the 60s era and that, as students of color, they entered quite predictably as basic writers and only as basic writers" (571). Although the authors' goal is to adjust and broaden the historical lens of analysis, this "deepening sense" Royster and Williams describe should be understood as an issue of representation. The conflation of basic writing and Black college students of the sixties and seventies is a direct consequence of a network of historical practices that positioned these students in the public sphere as the products of open admission programs and marked them as politically militant but underprepared and lacking in linguistic resources and rhetorical agency. For example, historicizing the birth of basic writing programs in the sixties and seventies, Bruce Horner suggests that two schools of thoughts were at work. First, because open admission was viewed by many as a quota system that was responsive to the political climate, it was commonly believed that prototypical open admission students were activists and ethnic minorities. Second, because student activism was often conflated with a lack of academic preparation, the public rhetorics of administrators and educators traditionally constructed these students as in need of remediation and incapable of excelling academically because of their interest in political affairs. Listen to the comments of education professor Lewis Mayhew, who directly linked student activists with illiteracy and language deficit theories:[1]

> Dissenting youth … all too frequently seem unable to say or write a simple English sentence. Their concerns are expressed…in a…flow of words possessing neither syntax or grammatical effectiveness…So pronounced are these linguistic failures that I have begun to wonder whether or not they might represent a pathology worthy of some further study. (qtd in Horner 8)

As Min-Zhan Lu points out, CUNY educator Geoffrey Wagner even went as far as to characterize open admission students as "dunces [. . . misfits . . . hostile mental children . . . and the most sluggish of animals" ("Conflict and Struggle" 34) and basic writing courses offered at City College in New York as "a form of political psychotherapy, a welfare agency, and an entertainment center" for Black

and other ethnic minority students (34).

Of course, by 1977, Mina Shaughnessy had spent almost a decade attempting to complicate these representational politics through her work as director of the SEEK and Writing programs at City College. In her seminal text on basic writing, Shaughnessy made it clear that most of the students who were the focus of her study were from "one of New York's ethnic or racial enclaves" (3), and to her credit, she didn't evoke language deficit theories to explain these students' poor performance in the writing classroom. But Shaughnessy still reinforced a view of these students as underprepared because she relied on a prescriptive but acontextual approach that inadequately considered the political dimensions of their writing practices. As Lu suggests, Shaughnessy's essentialist view of language—that differences in languages and conventions do not change the essential meaning communicated—privileged academic discourse as intellectually rigorous and politically "innocent" and compromised her ability to see the writing these students composed in the basic writing classroom as a site of struggle amongst relations of power and competing discourses and epistemologies ("Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy"). For Shaughnessy—and compositionists who aligned themselves with her work—these students' "errors" were the result of their positioning as novices in the basic writing classroom, their unfamiliarity with the conventions of academic discourse, and their lack of confidence in themselves as academic readers and writers.

In this article, I want to apply pressure to the representational politics that were tied to both Shaughnessy's work and the public rhetorics of administrators and educators during the period. Since the publication of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* and the burgeoning of basic writing as a sub-discipline in rhetoric and composition, much of the disciplinary research on Black college students of the sixties and seventies has left these representational politics under-challenged because it has uncomplicatedly tied these students to basic writing historiography. Expanding our purview beyond City College, basic writing, and open admissions, I want to counteract these disciplinary trends by directing our attention to the extracurriculum and authorizing it as a site where historiographers can recover histories that illustrate the co-constitutive relationship that was at work between the political activism of Black students of the sixties and seventies and their development as readers and writers. This article presents one such history that recovers and analyzes the political literacy education and practices of the student-activists of the Black Liberation Front International (BLFI), a Black student organization at Michigan State University from 1968 to 1975. Scholars generating work on the extracurriculum have demonstrated that literacy learning and development does occur outside of the classroom (e.g., Brandt; Gere; Moss; Sharer). In offering this recovered history, my aim, then, is to bring to light a nonacademic political space that functioned as a site of literacy education for the BLFI activists and to showcase how this site of literacy education provided the BLFI activists with opportunities to negotiate the demands of reading and writing.

I use the term "site of literacy education" in the same way that Shirley Wilson Logan uses the term "site of rhetorical education." In *Liberating Language*, Logan characterizes plantations, the pulpits of Black churches, literary and debating societies in Black Civil War units, Black political leagues, workplace factories, and the Black press as important sites of rhetorical education for nineteenth-century Black Americans. Logan takes care to point out that these were nonacademic

sites where nineteenth-century Black Americans rarely received explicit instruction in rhetorical theory and performance. Instead, Logan defines these sites of rhetorical education as places where nineteenth-century Black Americans were involved in acts of communication and were the recipients of information disseminated through the practices of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These were sites where nineteenth-century Black Americans "acquired and developed the rhetorical astuteness to negotiate a hostile environment and at the same time established a common language employed both to interact with and to challenge and change this environment" (Logan 3). Similarly, there were nonacademic political sites that enabled the BLFI activists to negotiate and enact a range of political ideologies and organizational strategies through reading and writing activities. These were sites where the BLFI activists learned and practiced literacy for political aims. This article narrows its focus to one of these sites—a place the BLFI activists affectionately called The People's House.

In 1967, Michigan State University initiated the Detroit Project, and while it wasn't an open admission program, it did represent a shift in university policy in admission of minority students. In its first year of implementation, it brought 67 Black students to MSU. Despite the Detroit Project's success in increasing Black student enrollment, historical records suggest that Black students were not readily accepted at MSU during this period of intensified recruitment and admissions. To counter these conditions, Black students carved out space on campus by creating Black population centers in the dorms and securing off-campus housing. These were social spaces, however, and for the student-activists of the newly formed Black Liberation Front International, they were insufficient in terms of providing space to actively pursue their political interests that were emerging and developing in response to the Black radicalism that was sweeping the period. As Ibram H. Rogers notes in his study on the Black Campus Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, at institutions across the country, Black student activism was intensifying. With the formation of Black Student Unions (BSUs), members of these organizations were calling for a reconstitution of higher education, advocating for Black and Ethnic Studies programs, fighting for the rights of Black nonacademic workers, launching all forms of community activism (e.g., food drives, tutoring programs, day care services, reading and study groups), campaigning to free political prisoners, and combating gentrification in Black communities. By the fall semester of 1968, the BLFI activists had also witnessed the radicalization of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Stokely Carmichael's calls for Black Power. The assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and the uprisings in cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, Watts, and Newark were reinforcing Carmichael's call to action, and the political interests of the BLFI activists were also being fueled by African decolonization efforts, Third World independence movements, and the BLFI activists' developing relationships with national and local organizations invested in the internationalization of the Black Power Movement.[2]

Indeed, finding a space where they could foster the development of these emerging political interests was imperative, and in 1968, the BLFI activists found such a space when two Kenyan graduate students, Maina-wa Kinyatti and Kamuyu Kang'ethe, decided to convert the three-bedroom, two-story house they were renting into The People's House. Upon their arrival at MSU, Kinyatti and Kang'ethe established a Michigan chapter of the Pan-African Students Organization and Association (PASOA); they were dedicated to using The People's House to bring together Black and

African students for social gatherings and political meetings and discussions. But within a year of its inception, the kinds of political activities that The People's House supported were extended to include a range of politicized literacy activities. Here, through their critical reading and collaborative writing practices, the BLFI activists organized with PASOA, defined the BLFI's political agenda, and worked towards producing Black student activists who were both theoreticians and organizers, actively participating in the cause of Black liberation on campus and in their surrounding communities.

In what follows, I examine the critical reading and collaborative writing practices that The People's House supported, considering how such practices construct The People's House as a site of literacy education and pose a challenge to the politics that marked Black students of the sixties and seventies as politically militant but rhetorically bankrupt and/or remedial in their literate practices. I begin with an examination of the BLFI activists' political aims and their relationship with the Trinidadian intellectual and activist C.L.R. James. In doing so, I recount how James's positioning as the BLFI activists' "personal Professor Emeritus" created the contexts for the BLFI activists to organize reading groups at The People's House, where they developed a form of critical reading praxis that enhanced their abilities to engage reading as a political, rhetorical, and epistemic act. Next, I turn to the collaborative writing the BLFI activists composed at The People's House, examining such texts within a translingual framework. Contesting monolingualism in US composition, translingualists tend to work from one or more of several tenets, ranging from a view of language as performative and communicative practices as mesopolitical acts to an attentiveness to the ways in which writers "tinker with authorized contexts, perspectives, and conventions of meaning making" and engage acts of difference through "iterations of dominant conventions as well as deviation from the norm" *(*Lu and Horner, "Introduction" 208). Questioning the significance of theories of performance and sameness-as-difference models in translingualism, Keith Gilyard, however, recommends that translingualists "document students' efforts" (288), analyzing the ways in which distinct populations of student writers negotiate language, diversity, and power. In fact, Gilyard gives a nod to historiography, returning to the 1960's and 1970's and calling for translinguals to "write histories of the translanguagers who organized at City College and other places" (288). Responding to Gilyard's call, but also working from selected tenets of translingualism, I am constructing the BLFI activists' collaborative writing as a site for translingual production. In my analyses, I am privileging a translingual interpretive framework that brings to light the ways in which the BLFI activists, as a community of writers, worked across a network of strategies, practicing how to use the linguistic and discursive resources they had available to them to attend to the material and rhetorical aspects of writing. In speaking of the rhetorical and material aspects of writing, I am referencing audience considerations, purposes, subjective and political commitments, and relations of power.

It is important to note that my investment in this recovered history project is both scholarly and personal. I grew up hearing the stories of my father's college activism as a member of the Black Liberation Front International, but one aspect of the stories that was always interesting to me was how the BLFI activists created the *Mazungumzo*, a journal of African Studies that was distributed domestically and internationally. For over thirty years, my father kept stored in the basement of his Detroit home an archive that contained copies of the *Mazungumzo* and the BLFI's reading materials

and political writings. In this regard, by recovering the history of the BLFI activists' political literacy education, I am substantiating what Wendy B. Sharer characterizes as the "scholarly standing of the affective domain" (55). Scholars in rhetoric and composition have increasingly acknowledged that our research agendas often emerge from our lived and affective experiences. It was the discovery of her grandmother's personal archives that led Sharer to investigate the ways in which study groups and letter-writing campaigns mediated women's participation in political affairs from 1915 to 1930. One of Sharer's goals was to "foster a desire in future scholars to explore the rhetorical practices of family members and friends, and, at the same time, to counteract the restrictions and assumptions that place family and friends—'personal relationships' and the affective domains that surround them—beyond the boundaries of valid research" (54-55).

Indeed, I have responded to Sharer's vision by returning to where it all began for me—with my father's stories and basement archives. Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan have advocated for expanding what they call a "narrow conception of archives" (4), and their edited collection documents how researchers in the fields of composition and literacy have taken up this advocacy by using regional and family archives for their data collection and analyses. Although I began my archival work by retrieving documents on the history of the BLFI and Black student activism at MSU from the university's Archives and Historical Collections,[3] I also expanded what counts as archives by recovering a portion of the BLFI activists' political writings and reading materials from my father's basement archives. Additionally, I collected some of the BLFI activists' collaboratively written texts from Ernie Boone, the founder of the *Westside News*, a community newspaper that was a part of the Black press in Lansing. Several of the BLFI activists served as staff writers, editors, and production and distribution assistants for the *Westside News*. Boone, like my father, preserved in his Ann Arbor residence editions of the *Westside News* that featured articles written by the BLFI activists from 1968 to 1975.[4]

The history presented in this article is part of a larger project I have undertaken to recover the political literacies of the student-activists of the BLFI. To curate an understanding of the contexts of production for their critical reading and collaborative writing practices, I relied on a combination of (1) archival material; (2) interdisciplinary scholarship on C.L.R. James, the Black Campus movement of the sixties and seventies, and the Black radical tradition; and (3) analysis of transcripts of oral history interviews I conducted, including those with two members of the BLFI, Terry "Abdul" Johnson and Chui Karega; the two Kenyan graduate students who established The People's House, Maina wa-Kinyatti and Kamuyu Kang'ethe; and Ernie Boone, the founder of the *Westside News*. Although I am constructing the BLFI activists as a community of readers and writers who engaged literacy at The People's House for political aims, the recollections of Terry "Abdul" Johnson and Chui Karega are centered in this research because Johnson and Karega held leadership roles in the BLFI that directly informed and shaped their critical reading and collaborative writing practices. Johnson was chief editor for the *Westside News*, which is where the BLFI activists published most of their collaboratively written texts, and Karega was the BLFI's Minister of Information and senior editor of the *Mazungumzo*.

Brad Lucas makes a case for understanding oral history interviews as "interpersonal exchanges

developed with multiple perspectives and complex dialectical processes" (27). As Lucas points out, this approach to oral history deconstructs the role of the interviewer (researcher) as interrogator and imbues a sense of agency to interviewees (participants) by re-conceptualizing them as more than repositories of knowledge. This way of thinking about oral history interviews as "a looking together at something" (30) was essential in terms of uncovering the relationship between the BLFI activists' political activism and their work on an organizational level as extracurricular readers and writers. In light of Karega and Johnson's respective leadership positions in the organization, there were three important parts of my work in constructing a historical account of the BLFI activists' political literacy education at The People's House: (1) providing Johnson and Karega opportunities to reflect on and attribute meaning to the BLFI activists' critical reading and collaborative writing practices; (2) looking for patterns of agreement in Karega and Johnson's recollections; and (3) placing identifiable patterns of agreement in Karega and Johnson's recollections in analytical conversation with selected examples of the BLFI activists' critical reading and collaborative writing practices, the contexts of production for their political literacies, and scholarship on critical reading, collaborative writing, and translingual composition.[5]

"Our Own Personal Professor Emeritus": C.L.R. James, Black Radicalism, and Critical Reading Praxis

In an article published in MSU's campus newspaper, Terry "Abdul" Johnson, writing as a representative of the BLFI, critiqued the state of Black student activism at MSU:

> The failures of black students to be a progressive force at MSU is not just a problem of outside forces . . . Until some black students or a large group of black students decide to seriously study student organizational and ideological problems, black students will remain subject to the whims of an educational system which is systematically opposed to the plight of black and other oppressed people. ("Lack of Organization Hurts Students")

The radicalization of Black MSU students, Johnson continued theorizing, had to involve three elements, "concrete goals, objectives, and functional organizational definitions," and these elements needed to include "something more than just the word freedom" ("Lack"). In short, Johnson was calling for a shift in political agency and practice among Black students at MSU. But instead of merely exhorting Black MSU students to adopt their proposed form of political activism, the BLFI activists wanted to assume a lead role in undertaking this shift towards a form of Black political radicalism that emphasized the integration of theory and practice. The reading groups that were organized at

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C.L.R. James's political and intellectual legacy is transnational and extensive, including contributions to the fields of history, political theory, philosophy, cultural studies, and literature, to name a few. When he relocated to England in 1932, James became one of Leon Trotsky's leading spokespersons and was developing into what Robin D. G. Kelley describes as a "Marxist intellectual with Pan-Africanist leanings" (3). With the encouragement and support of Trotsky, in 1938 James left England for the US to begin a national speaking tour geared towards encouraging Black participation in labor politics. Although his speaking tour was supposed to be brief, growing disillusion with Trotskyism and his disputes with Trotsky over the "Negro Question" caused James to remain in the US, where his work was transformed from what Andrew J. Douglas describes as "a mission for Trotsky" into "more of an open-ended learning experience" (424). After Trotsky's assassination in 1940, it was clear that James was working from a Black radical tradition that Cedric Robinson, in *Black Marxism*, argues emerged as a critique of Western radicalism and a belief in the insufficiency of Marxist traditions. In terms of his written texts, James was recontextualizing aspects of Marxism-Leninism for his critical studies of the revolutionary character of Black struggle throughout the diaspora and on the African continent.

Although James was deported from the US in 1953, when he was allowed to re-enter the US in 1968, he found himself surrounded by a new generation of young Black radicals searching for ways to unite theory and practice to challenge racism, colonialism, and imperialism. This is how James first met Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, and that initial meeting served as the impetus behind James's interest in working with the BLFI activists. James continued to travel to Lansing for invited talks and presentations, forging a relationship with the BLFI activists over time; this was a critical positioning for James that provided a much needed service to the BLFI activists. "We worked very closely with C.L.R.," Johnson explained. "We knew that racism would keep us from getting all the education we needed from the university," Karega recalled, "and we really depended on those we knew were political and academic like C.L.R."

Here, Johnson and Karega are describing the BLFI activists' critique of the "normalized mask of whiteness" in higher education, a concept Ibram H. Rogers argues is important in terms of understanding the Black Campus Movement. Rogers historicizes how Black students of the sixties and seventies advocated for the reform of higher education by arguing that colleges and universities were fostering institutional climates that positioned White and Eurocentric ideas, peoples, and scholarship as the center of a universal standard curriculum. For the BLFI activists, one way to subvert the "normalized mask of whiteness" was to extend their education beyond the confines of the classroom by hosting lectures and talks delivered by Black scholars and activists such as Walter Rodney, the historian and Guyanese revolutionary who was working out of the University of Michigan at the time, Robert F. Williams, Stokely Carmichael, and of course, C.L.R. James. In particular, when the BLFI activists invited James to Lansing to speak or give a lecture, they considered it to be an extracurricular learning experience for their own political aims. Here's how Karega described those

engagements:

> We went to C.L.R.'s school . . . We'd get a copy of something he wrote and we'd study it beforehand. It was school. He would come in and address a chapter and you were expected to have read prior and to be prepared on the subject and prepared to discuss the subject when the professor stood up. And that's what we did.

Those preparatory reading and study sessions took place at The People's House, primarily because of its operational character. The People's House evolved into a site of literacy education because it was a social and political space that was disengaged from the instructional and disciplining gaze of Whites and Whiteness. By reading and discussing James's writings in those preparatory sessions, the BLFI activists were introduced to the political nature of revisionist historiography, and they became adept at understanding political texts written by Black authors as rhetorical and epistemic. Additionally, by placing James's writings in conversation with the writings of Hegel and Leftist thinkers such as Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky, the BLFI activists were able to negotiate variants of European and Western political philosophy in ways that rivaled their engagements with such concepts and ideas in academic contexts. Furthermore, by centering this kind of analysis in their critical reading praxis, the BLFI activists were empowered in their efforts to make sense of the distinctiveness of Black radicalism and the extent to which it could be used theoretically and organizationally for Black insurgency.

To illustrate, let us consider examples of the critical reading praxis that the BLFI activists adopted for the texts they were reading and studying in preparation for James's visits and lectures. One of the texts that the BLFI activists placed at the center of those sessions was James's *Notes on Dialectics*. In *Notes*, James was working through methods for using the concepts of Hegel's *Science of Logic* to understand the history of labor movements, to make sense of the spontaneity and organization of the working masses, and to speculate on the movements that might emerge as a result of proletarian spontaneity and self-organization. Even though James considered *Notes* to be one of his most important writings, it has been a text that contemporary scholars of James's work have tended to avoid—arguably because of its dense nature and the philosophic issues surrounding it. For scholars who have written about James's *Notes*, the main goals have been to interpret the relationship between James's dialectics and the concepts of Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. This was the kind of critical reading that the BLFI activists were doing in their preparatory reading groups at The People's House, and it was a critical reading praxis that was developed by the BLFI activists as a direct response to their engagements with European and Western philosophy and politics for their academic coursework. Karega explained:

> Most of us were taking some heavy-hitting courses in philosophy, history, and political science. We were reading all kinds of stuff in these classes like Hegel and Marx . . . But there was a problem. We weren't satisfied that we could make those theories work for us and what we were doing. So we were more than anxious to hear from someone who could talk about the strengths and short falls of those theories and who had reworked those theories for the Black experience.

Karega's recollections suggest that there was recognition on the part of the BLFI activists of the canonical nature of the texts that they were reading for their academic courses. To engage these

canonical texts critically in ways that supported the BLFI's political work, the BLFI activists kept their understanding of James's Pan-African positionality at the forefront of their study of his writings, and according to Johnson and Karega, they were reading *Notes* in ways that that helped them do four things: (1) interpret the relationship between James's dialectics and the dialectical materialism of Marxism-Leninism; (2) understand the limitations and errors of orthodox Trotskyism; (3) work through Leninism; and (4) position the BLFI's work, theoretically and organizationally, in relation to this range of Leftist politics and a Black radical tradition that valued the possibilities of Black autonomous political movements.

This form of critical reading praxis required that the BLFI activists identify in the text James's interpretations of Hegel's categories of thought and assess the lines of reasoning James employed for applying those interpreted categories of Hegelian dialectics to politics. In this regard, in their reading of *Notes*, the BLFI activists were participating in a form of critical reading that Nancy Morrow defines in her work examining the role of reading in composition theory and pedagogy. Morrow articulates a view of reading that involves more than just basic comprehension. For example, two important aspects of Morrow's view of critical reading emphasize readers' ability "to assess bias, to articulate opposing viewpoints, to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and to make judgments about texts" and "recognize when conventions are followed and when they are subverted" (466). So on one level, when Karega recalled that the BLFI activists were reading and studying *Notes*, working through how James's interpretations of Hegelian dialectics were informing and shaping his critique of Lenin's vanguard party, he was shedding light on how they were engaging in the kind of critical awareness and assessment work Morrow describes not only by recognizing the fact that James was subverting a conventional theory in Leninist politics but also by evaluating how and to what extent James's Pan-Africanist leanings were mediating factors in his argument that party politics had run their course in labor movements. On another level, when Johnson revealed that the BLFI activists were considering if and to what extent James's framework could be used to interpret historical Black autonomous movements, he was pointing to how they were engaging in a form of critical reading where they were making judgments about texts and evaluating strengths and weaknesses. In this instance, the BLFI activists were critically reading James's dialectics, assessing whether his framework could illuminate the kinds of contemporary challenges to State-capitalism that could emerge from the Black working class.

In addition to James's writings on dialectics, the BLFI activists were also reading and studying James's historiographical work on Black autonomous movements, and as Johnson recalled, this was a genre of writing and inquiry that they were eager to engage:

> C.L.R. was rewriting our history. All I heard in school about us, our history, was how we were slaves and how bad it was for us and how we were oppressed and powerless . . . We're all reading this Marxist theory wanting so bad to just read and talk about something that told us how we have been the proletariat revolting. Even if it hadn't been successful, we wanted to read that and we wanted other people to know what our revolutionary potential was and could be. That's where we felt you had to begin —changing our understandings and Black people's understandings as a whole of what our revolutionary potential was and could

be. C.L.R.'s books spoke to us on those frustrations and desires.

Johnson is emphasizing the ways in which their reading of James's revisionist historiography provided the BLFI activists with opportunities to make sense of what Robin D. G. Kelley calls "history from below." James wrote texts such as *The History of Pan-African Revolt* to challenge misrepresentations about the revolutionary history of Black laborers (enslaved and free). "The only place where Negroes did not revolt," James once argued, "is in the pages of capitalist historians" ("Revolution" 339). In their reading groups at The People's House, the BLFI activists read and discussed *The History of Pan-African Revolt*, paying attention to how and why James was writing from the margins but presenting a challenge to traditional historiography by constructing a Marxian portrait of Black revolt that featured the self-mobilization efforts and self-emancipation processes of peoples of African descent. Johnson's memories evoke the BLFI activists' particular interest in James's revisionism of slave revolts in the US, but the BLFI activists also focused on placing in their rhetorical context other examples such as the labor strikes in Sierra Leone and South Africa and the period of strikes across the Caribbean, to name a few.

Lastly, as part of their engagements with critical reading, the BLFI activists also used James's writings to consider the relationship between rhetorical versatility and the work of the Black intellectual. The BLFI activists believed that James had a clear understanding of the functioning purpose and power of rhetorical versatility in terms of writing and the composition of written texts. "[James] didn't write *From Dubois to Fanon* in the same way that he wrote *State Capitalism and World Revolution*," Karega explained. "They were written for different reasons and for different audiences, so how he went about writing them had to be different, and we looked at that." Implicit in Karega's reflections is a form of critical reading praxis that Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior characterize as "reading civic texts for the means of rhetorical action, for the presence of tropes and topics, the signs of audience and authorial construction" (2). On the one hand, the BLFI activists were examining how James's *From Dubois to Fanon* mediated his efforts to chart the history of Pan-African politics and position his own work in relation to it. It was a text arguably written to a Pan-African audience—in particular, proponents of Pan-Africanism who would have had some familiarity with the subject matter. Hence, the text was argumentative but informal. That is, while James was making an argument about the richness of a tradition of Pan-Africanism that could be located historically and contemporarily, he didn't spend a lot of time in the essay performing a critical analysis of the theories and politics of Pan-Africanists such as Fanon and Dubois. Instead, the text reads as a narrative explanation of sorts of the theories, practices, politics, and personalities of some of the notable figures attached to Pan-Africanism. On the other hand, the BLFI activists were analyzing the implications of James writing *State Capitalism and World Revolution* in 1950 and in consultation with Raja Dunayeyskaya and Grace Lee Boggs, who both shared his disillusionment with Trotskyism and had formed with James an opposition State-Capitalist Tendency within the American Trotskyist movement. In the essay, James attempted to carve out a theory of State-capitalism that repudiated Trotskyism. His audience was arguably two populations of individuals—those who aligned themselves with Trotsky and his politics and those who were experiencing the same kind of disillusionment with Trotskyism. As such, the text is heavy in theory and critical analysis of the theoretical frameworks under review.

The comparative analysis of James's writings that I have reproduced and modeled here is demonstrative of what Karega and Johnson identified as an important component of the critical reading praxis the BLFI activists adopted in their reading and study sessions at The People's House. In this instance, they directed their attention towards the diverse contexts and authorial purposes that informed and shaped the tropes, arguments, and lines of reasoning James employed in each text.

"Coupled with the preparatory reading for James's lectures that introduced them to revisionist historiography and provided them with opportunities to identify and assess the assumptions, complexities, and implications of arguments in written texts, this critical reading praxis constructed The People's House as a site of literacy education that often rivaled the university contexts where they were engaging literacy for academic purposes."

As we will see in the next section, James's attentiveness to a rhetorical versatility based on contextual awareness was a practice the BLFI activists adopted and privileged in their collaborative writing contexts. Coupled with the preparatory reading for James's lectures that introduced them to revisionist historiography and provided them with opportunities to identify and assess the assumptions, complexities, and implications of arguments in written texts, this critical reading praxis constructed The People's House as a site of literacy education that often rivaled the university contexts where they were engaging literacy for academic purposes.

Collaborative Writing as Translingual Practice

As important as the reading groups were for the BLFI activists, it was also imperative that they take the theories and strategies for Black insurgency that they were reading and studying at The People's House and use them to *do* the work of the BLFI. The collaborative writing they were doing at The People's House was an integral part of the BLFI activists' pursuit of these objectives. Paul Lowry, Aaron Curtis, and Michelle Lowry argue that reactive writing occurs "when writers create a document in real time, reacting and adjusting to each other's changes and additions" (78). I would argue that the BLFI activists' collaborative writing was a form of reactive writing, functioning as a situated practice of rhetorical and political negotiation.

Reflecting on the character of their collaborative writing contexts, Karega summarized the ways in which negotiated considerations of their cultural and political commitments were determining factors for the language and discourse practices that the BLFI activists adopted for their collaboratively written texts:

> With these papers, everybody added to it, refined it, edited it, the whole thing . . . We all had opinions on how it should all come together . . . There were times we knew we had to write in a way that made it plain for everyone . . . We also believed that African languages and names are important to Black culture, history, and just how we as Black people understand ourselves. Most of us learned Swahili . . . But we didn't think what was considered academic language was superior or something we as Black people have no claim to. If the oppressor's

> language was what they considered academic language or proper English, whatever that is, then we wanted to also make the oppressor's language work for us and what we were trying to do in challenging oppression . . . We knew we could do that by showing we could use it or playing with it in ways that served our goals.

Karega's articulation of the BLFI activists' commitment to "making it plain" is a reference to a discursive practice about which Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, was particularly impassioned. Writing in an essay pamphlet entitled *Organization and Spontaneity*, Mohammed argued that "[e]very effort must be made to take theory out of the world of academics and to integrate it into the day-to-day struggles of the mass of the population where it rightfully belongs. That is: theoretical jargon must be broken down into understandable language and placed before the masses; and the ordinary man and woman must be encouraged to undertake theoretical work" (23). Mohammed's theory of political discourse required a commitment on the part of the revolutionary speaker and writer to theoretical simplicity for the purpose of uniting the masses in the work of Black revolutionary struggle. In terms of their learning of Swahili, the BLFI activists were responding to their engagements with the theorizations of President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania—one of which was his promotion of Swahili as a language of African liberation and pride. The BLFI activists learned the East African language through intercultural contact with Maina wa Kinyatti and Kamuyu Kang-ethe at The People's House

"A close look at the BLFI activists' use of theory discursively, their use of African languages rhetorically, and their experiments with conventional spelling will cast these student-activists as a community of writers who (1) understood their political activism and their collaborative writing as co-constitutive, (2) exercised the rhetorical versatility they learned from their reading of C.L.R James's writings, and (3) recognized repetition and difference as linguistic and discursive meaning making acts and tactics for political dissent."

and instructional aids selected by the two Kenyan graduate students that placed Swahili within the context of its grammatical, semantic, phonological, and cultural contexts. In short, the repertoire of linguistic and discursive practices that the BLFI activists' negotiated in their collaborative writing contexts affirmed the political importance of theoretical simplicity and African languages but also recognized the political value of repetition and creative experimentation with conventional language.

It is not a surprise, then, that the pages of their collaborative writing showcase the BLFI activists engaging in translingual practices, working across a network of linguistic and discursive practices. To illustrate, the following sections analyze two selected examples of texts that the BLFI activists collaboratively composed at The People's House. One text entitled "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" was written for the BLFI's editorial column in the *Westside News,* the community newspaper with which the BLFI was actively involved in terms of writing, production, and distribution. The second text is one of several manifestos that the BLFI activists wrote in response to the controversy surrounding the African Studies Center on MSU's campus. A close look at the BLFI activists' use of theory discursively, their use of African languages rhetorically, and their experiments with conventional spelling will cast these student-activists as a community of

writers who (1) understood their political activism and their collaborative writing as co-constitutive, (2) exercised the rhetorical versatility they learned from their reading of C. L. R James's writings, and (3) recognized repetition *and* difference as linguistic and discursive meaning making acts and tactics for political dissent.

Making it Plain: Constructing Theory as Proletarian

The recollections of Karega and Johnson indicate that the BLFI activists used their editorial column in the *Westside News* as a viable medium for altering conditions that had stabilized social and political boundaries that limited contact between Black MSU students and residents of Lansing's Black communities. Ernie Boone, the founder of the *Westside News*, explained that one featured column of the newspaper was dedicated to the Lansing Black church community, while another column, "It's Your Thing," focused on social events and news in Lansing. Armed with their goal to develop and strengthen a political collective that included the BLFI activists and the *Westside News's* communally Black readership, "making it plain" was the discursive strategy that was privileged by the BLFI activists for their editorial articles. One of the tenets of translingualism views writers' linguistic and discursive choices as "shaping as well as shaped by the contexts of utterance and the social positionings of the writers, and thus having material consequences on the life and world we live in" (Lu and Horner, "Introduction" 208). I would argue that there was a definitive co-constitutive relationship between their efforts to proletarianize in their editorial articles the theories and arguments they were engaging in their reading groups and the work they were doing to politically organize across campus and community contexts, according to a form of political Blackness that emphasized the integration of theory and practice.

The article "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" provides ample evidence of the contextual aptitude the BLFI activists employed when constructing theory as proletarian in these editorial articles. Johnson and Karega remembered that the writing goal for this particular article was twofold: to address the question of whether Black Americans should participate in the militaristic and political struggles of the United States and to illustrate the extent to which neocolonialism was at work in the United States. In addition to the writings of C.L.R. James, in their reading groups at The People's House, the BLFI activists were studying the writings of African revolutionaries and leaders such as Sekou Toure from Guinea and Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana. They were particularly drawn to postcolonial theory and Nkrumah's writings on neocolonialism. In a document drafted by The Third All-African People's Conference held March of 1961 in Cairo, neocolonialism was defined as "the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries that become victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical [forces]" (reprinted in Wallerstein 260). Reflecting on Nkrumah's writings on neocolonialism, Johnson explained that his critiques of the postcolonial phenomenon were attractive to the BLFI activists because they believed that despite geographical differences there were similarities in terms of what Blacks in America and Africans on the continent were experiencing socially, economically, and politically: "We believed that here in the US, we [Black Americans] are also in a postcolonial situation; we are just in the West and not in

Africa and our colonizer has always resided and continues to reside right along with us in the same location and country."

Consistent with their efforts to "make it plain" for the purpose of political unity and organizational affect, in "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation," the BLFI activists refrained from using the kinds of theoretical jargon and theory-heavy lines of reasoning traditionally valued in the academy, instead taking care to paint a recognizable portrait of how neocolonialism was manifesting itself in the everyday lives of Black Americans through the military and police forces. They never used the word "neocolonialism," nor did they cite any of Nkrumah's writings or integrate into the text chains of discourse that writers such as Nkrumah drew upon to construct their analyses and critiques of the postcolonial phenomenon. Instead, the BLFI activists "made it plain" by using other methods of argumentation such as citing contextually relevant information that they believed was important to persuasively convey the tenets of neocolonialism to their readership.

On one front, they turned to the troubled history Black Americans have had with the United States military:

> Afrikans have participated in every war the United States has entered. We have fought and we have died to maintain this land. What we didn't bargain for was the maintenance of the double standard, based on skin color, which the government and people of the United States of Amerikkka maintains. We have fought and died in all the wars, but we still do not have freedom, justice, or equality. The three basic rights of a human being.
>
> We Afrikans receive nothing for our sacrifices in the US military. Remember the late Brother Poindexter E. Williams? A 20 year young Afrikan who was killed in Viet Nam serving the interest of the US imperialist. The brother died in the Nam fighting for this country, but the brother's family was prohibited from burying the dead soldier's body in the same cemetery with white folks until they got a court injunction. The brother died for NOTHING!

Here, using tropes and experiences that the BLFI activists knew would, as Johnson recalled, "resound true" for their communally Black readership, they were illustrating methods designed to situate Black Americans as participants in policies and practices that were authorizing and sustaining hegemony and ultimately their own oppression. The BLFI activists were arguing here that despite participation in the militaristic and political struggles of the United States—struggles that the BLFI activists believed were imperialistic and capitalist-driven—social and institutionalized racism was denying Black Americans the same basic human rights (freedom, justice, and equality) that they were helping the US protect and maintain. Furthermore, the BLFI activists knew that the legal battles surrounding Poindexter Williams's burial in the state-funded cemetery designated for servicemen killed in Vietnam had been featured regularly in the nightly news on television and publicized in newspapers across the country. The attention to unequal treatment in the mass media gave the BLFI activists an opportunity to illustrate one of the indirect methods that were being used to uphold racialized oppression and hegemony despite the abolition of the domestic colonial system that had subjugated Black Americans for centuries and despite the fact that progress in securing civil rights for Black Americans and abolishing the Jim Crow system was being made in the courts and in the legislative

branch. The denial of burial rights for Black soldiers was an example that the BLFI activists knew would provoke strong personal and political opinions amongst their communally Black readership.

On another front, the BLFI activists relied on three events that readers of the *Westside News* would also be familiar with—the urban rebellions of the sixties, the protest activism that had occurred at Mississippi Valley State College, and the corruption of urban police forces:

> Notice that in the recent urban rebellions it was the division of the army that utilized most the bodies of our Afrikan brothers—the paratroopers. No planes used, but the paratroopers were sent. Afrikans sent to quell the just struggle of Afrikans. The white guards are unable to handle us Afrikan people. That too is why Afrikans are being used to murder Afrikans.
>
> Remember when the brothers and sisters were protesting conditions at Mississippi Valley State College. When oppressive agents (police) were brought in to arrest the students, we found that the skin of these agents of the oppressor was Black.
>
> Urban police forces are just extensions of the US military machine, present to protect the interest of the Europeans. The police will arrest an alcoholic who is injuring no one but himself but will not arrest the landlord who exploits the low income brother who rents from him, or the crooks who sell unsanitary meat and other foods to Afrikan people, nor will they arrest the men who really bring the dope into our community. They will arrest the dope, but the police don't touch the source that gives the dope to that brother.

In these three paragraphs, to support the BLFI activists' claim that Black Americans should refrain from participating in the US military and city police forces, they used these three events to continue demonstrating the tactics of neocolonialism, one of which is divide and conquer methods. Colonial rule is often sustained in postcolonial contexts by breaking up territories into smaller states that are unable to develop themselves and are dependent on colonial economic resources. Unity amongst the individual states is difficult if not impossible, and state agencies play an important role in this process by actively recruiting workers from subjugated populations who will enforce policies and practices that help colonial nations exert power and curb resistance efforts and any attempts at unity amongst these smaller states. Armed with this information, in these three paragraphs, the BLFI activists sought to demonstrate how these methods of neocolonialism were also manifesting themselves in Black communities in the United States through the work of the army, National Guard, and city police forces who were actively recruiting Black soldiers and officers.

Theory as a Discursive Weapon

When it came to their manifestos on the African Studies Center controversy on MSU's campus, the BLFI activists exercised a level of rhetorical versatility, determining that constructing theory as proletarian was not the strategy that would best fit their goals. One of the BLFI activists' first political initiatives on MSU's campus focused on placing the African Studies Center under Black leadership and control. In October of 1969, with representatives of PASOA, the BLFI activists took over and occupied for several hours the ASC while its staff composed of White faculty and scholars was attending a conference in Montreal. Three days after the occupation ended, the BLFI activists and the PASOA representatives met with the staff from the ASC, but the meeting was unsuccessful,

and the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives walked out. Over the next year, as they were confronted with a new set of challenges, the BLFI activists drafted a series of manifestos on the ASC controversy. First, the ASC's staff was challenging the argument that the ASC needed Black leadership. For example, resigning after pressure from the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives, the ASC's White director, Dr. Charles Hughes, made the following declaration in his statement of resignation: "I don't believe in color magic. There is nothing in the genes that allows a person to know more about an area. I think the African Studies Center is, by its name, concerned with events in Africa" ("Africanization" 2-3). Second, MSU's administration had made no progress in securing funding for the salary of a new director. The Plenary Group of the African Studies Center, which had a fair representation of Black and African students and faculty, had recommended Elliot Skinner, a Black professor of Anthropology from Columbia University. But using local and campus press, MSU's administration was citing anticipated reduction of Federal support and restricted state-funded resources as both the cause of the delay in hiring Skinner and to justify the steady cuts in the ASC's budget they had made since the BFLI activists and PASOA representatives issued their demands (Saddler). Responsively, the BLFI activists were challenging these official narratives by also giving statements to local and campus press (Saddler). But they knew they needed more. Whereas it was contextually appropriate and necessary for them to take theory out of the world of academics when writing for the *Westside News*, the BLFI activists knew they had to use theory against the academics on the opposing side of the power struggle for control over the ASC.

In terms of praxis, translingualism also views writers as "actively negotiating and constituting complex relations of power at the dynamic intersection of the social-historical (macro) and the personal (micro) levels" (Lu and Horner, "Introduction" 208). In their manifestos on the ASC, the BLFI activists' use of theoretical jargon and concepts privileged in academic contexts was an act of neither discursive imitation nor acquiescence to relations of power and conventional discursive practices. Rather, it was a mesopolitical discursive act in which postcolonial theory was used to mediate the BLFI activists' efforts to reverse power relations between MSU's administrators and the ASC's staff, on one side, and Black and African faculty and students on the other side. Integrating theories of neocolonialism into their manifestos on the African Studies Center enabled the BLFI activists to construct the ASC's work as antithetical to and exploitive of the discipline of African Studies and to position Black and African faculty and students as the correct and viable leadership option for the Center.

For example, in November of 1969, the BLFI issued a manifesto to the ASC's staff and MSU administrators, arguing their position on the ASC and proposing a seven part programmatic approach "to eventually halt racism and neocolonialism stemming from the seeds planted by the African Studies Center at MSU." This time they were using the word "neocolonialism" and patterns of discourse that formed the basis of critiques of the postcolonial phenomenon. At one point in the manifesto they also wrote:

> African Studies in the United States is harmoniously integrated into Western imperialism. It is nothing more than scientific neocolonialism. African Studies centers are institutionalized indoctrination mechanisms utilized to perpetuate racism and legitimize colonialism, old

and new. Governmental agencies, major corporations, foundations and Western ideologies are the influencing forces that shape the ideological contents of research about Africa.

The African Studies profession has historically been overwhelmingly white. Blacks have never been strongly encouraged and given the opportunity to enter the profession. As a result of this white domination of the field, the myths about Africans and the reinforcers of these myths, i.e., terms like primitive, pagan, savage, tribal, etc., have never been destroyed. The longevity of these myths has also effectively divided the peoples of African descent.

As Karega explained, in this excerpt the BLFI activists were theorizing how and to what extent the research of White scholars in African Studies was being used to continue the subjugation of peoples of African descent through ideological and institutional practices that were authorized by the collaborative endeavors of Western educators and state and corporate powers. First, African Studies was explicitly named as an extension of neocolonialism—a form of "scientific neocolonialism." Writing in 1967, Johann Galtung defined scientific colonialism as the process "whereby the centre of gravity for the acquisition of knowledge about the nation is located outside the nation itself" (13). Continuing his theorization of the term, Galtung warned that "Social science knowledge about a small nation in the hands of a big power is a potentially dangerous weapon [contributing] to the asymmetric patterns already existing in the world because it contributes to manipulation in the interests of big powers" (14). Although the BLFI activists called it "scientific neocolonialism," clearly in this excerpt they were constructing a parallel with the notion of scientific colonialism. Second, to give concrete appearances to neocolonial practices tied to African Studies centers, the BLFI activists used discourse markers to construct the centers and their work within the context of terminology and concepts specific to theories of neocolonialism. Here, we are talking about concepts such as "Western imperialism," "institutionalized indoctrination" and "colonialism" and anthropological terminology such as "primitive," "pagan," "savage," and "tribal." During the period, some scholars— Black and White—were theorizing these anthropological terms as demonstrative of what Nkrumah, in critiquing colonial education, described as "the propositions and presuppositions of the colonial epoch" ("The African Genius" 14).

Consistent with their efforts to use theory as a discursive weapon, in this manifesto the BLFI activists also made another move that they hadn't made in their articles for the *Westside News*. They cited the theories of White scholars who were also critical of the neocolonialist practices that the BLFI activists saw at work in the discipline of African Studies. Again, this was not a mere reproduction of a conventional academic writing practice, nor was it a mimicking of or bowing to what's traditionally valued in the academy. The meaning Karega attributed to this citation practice renders it important in terms of supporting their efforts to gain power and reassert the leadership of peoples of African descent in the discipline of African Studies. In this regard, it was a translingual act. Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu's translingual approach considers language practices within a spatial-temporal framework—the time, space, and place of their production. Such a framework enables Horner and Lu to view *every* language act—both repetition and deviation from the norm—as meaning making activities and sites for renegotiation, reinvention, reform, and reconstruction ("Translingual" 588). I am arguing here that the BLFI activists' direct quoting of White scholars' critiques of neocolonialism

in African Studies was a site where they were reworking the scholarship of their White allies in a new context for the BLFI's purposes and objectives.

For example, at one point in the manifesto, the BLFI activists quoted from the theorizations of White anthropologist Stanley Diamond, who was a member of a radical group of scholars in the African Studies Association that called itself the African Research Group. In the same year that the BLFI activists took over and occupied MSU's African Studies Center, the African Research Group published *African Studies in America: The Extended Family,* which summarized their critiques of the discipline. This was a text that in its Introduction characterized African Studies in the US as "a child of the American Empire . . . developed to meet the needs of ever-expanding US corporate and governmental penetration in Africa . . . [and] represent[ing] a clear and present danger to legitimate African aspirations for freedom, justice and revolutionary change" (1). The BLFI activists quoted directly from Diamond's contributions to the publication, which positioned African Studies as an institutional tool for the scientific neocolonialism the BLFI activists described earlier in the manifesto:

> We realize and agree with Stanley Diamond that Africa "has been a laboratory for too many American careers; too many papers and books are simply status symbols in the social system, the social struggle of the domestic academy, shaped by that system and couched in its limited and evasive language . . . African Studies has been careerist or merely fashionable; concern has been less with the subject of study, with the condition, needs and potential of African people, than with the abstract problems that qualified a student as an academic expert or Africanist; the latter certification presumably indicating a certain control over data but by no means guaranteeing the application of general intelligence to the problems of the subcontinent.

In this passage, the BLFI activists were constructing Diamond—and other scholars who were challenging the hegemonic and exploitive practices of the discipline of African Studies—as allies in their power struggle against the ASC's staff and MSU administrators. In addition to their own critiques that they articulated in the manifesto, the iteration of Diamond's counter-theories served as institutional backing for the BLFI activists as the ASC's staff and MSU's administrators continued to delimit the authority of the BLFI, the representatives from PASOA, and even the small group of allied Black and African faculty on MSU's campus.

Satiric Misspelling as a Tactic for Political Organizing and Dissent

Whereas the versatility the BLFI activists exercised in their use of theory discursively emphasizes the agentive character of their collaborative writing practices, another compelling aspect of their collaborative writing practices is the rhetorical agency they employed in their use of nonconventional spelling as a tactic for political organizing and dissent. If we return to the cited passages from the article "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation," one thing that stands out is the BLFI activists' use of satiric misspelling with the words "Amerikkka" and "Afrika." During the period, this was a linguistic practice that was adopted by some Black activists. It would be a mistake, however, to draw the conclusion that the BLFI activists' use of satiric misspelling in this article for the

Westside News was lacking in sophistication—a mere valorization and appropriation of a linguistic strategy that other Black radicals were using in their texts. Listen to Karega's contextualization of the BLFI activists' use of satiric misspelling in their editorial articles:

> We spelled America with three "k's" to represent the oppressiveness and the lynchings and enslavement and everything else Black people have been victimized by in the United States. Spelling can be political. We live in the West and we learn our ABC's and how to spell based on the Western world. But there are different spellings for just about every place on Earth. Africa was initially spelled with a "k" instead of a "c." So we were trying to let people know that there have been modifications to us. Everything about us has been changed to satisfy the way certain people talk, spell, everything . . . We wanted people reading to challenge us and say "You spelled Africa wrong." And they did. You know what that does though? It starts the conversation. Now I can talk to you about Africa. It's a door-opener, a starter. So now we're talking because of how I spelled Africa.

It is clear through Karega's comments that the BLFI activists' use of satiric misspelling was a political practice in terms of intent and desired effect. But more interestingly, Karega's comments suggest that the BLFI activists' satiric misspelling of the words "Africa" and "America" was indeed a form of translingual practice.

On the one hand, the BLFI activists' replacement of the "c" in "America" with "kkk" is demonstrative of a practice that Geneva Smitherman advocated for when she described power in language as the ability "to choose rhetorical strategies, not grammatical 'niceties,' for moving the audience in the direction desired" (91). The BLFI activists were addressing a communally Black readership and were guided by their efforts to write into existence a political Blackness that was radical in theory and practice. Although they did not shun using Standard Written English conventions in this editorial article, by tinkering with conventional spelling, the BLFI activists were repudiating the "mania of correctness" (*Talkin* 130) that Smitherman and others were working within and against professional organizations to challenge during the period. Their goal was to adapt linguistic symbolism tied to the Klu Klux Klan to construct a subversive portrait of Americanism in which White Supremacy is structurally and systemically embedded in the fabric of American life. On the other hand, in his reflections Karega, in his own way, was echoing Alastair Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation. Pennycook argues that "the notion of systematicity embedded in the concept of grammar is itself a product of repeated social action" (46). In this sense, as Karega pointed out, the structures and rules that underlie English used in Western contexts are the products of repetitious social practices and cultural conditioning. But in localities outside of Western contexts, where social practices and cultural conditioning have produced different languages, dialects, and linguistic rules and structures, European and Western hegemony and imperialism have altered not only these languages, dialects, and linguistic rules and structures, but also their respective contexts, cultures, and peoples. The BLFI activists' reworking of the spelling of "Africa" by removing the "c" and reinserting the "k" was a challenge to and subversion of these kinds of hegemonic and imperialist processes and practices—for themselves and for their targeted audience. In other words, by reconstructing—and in a sense restoring—African and diasporic meanings, contexts, and

identities through their use of satiric misspelling, the BLFI activists believed that they could not only encourage political dialogue between themselves and Black communities in Lansing but also bring to life, in a public discursive space, a version of the radicalized Black student activist that they wanted to produce at MSU.

Code-Meshing for Pan-African Unity and Affect

In this last section, I want to draw attention to a code-meshing practice the BLFI activists adopted, in which they meshed English with Swahili. Code-meshing refers to the simultaneous use of two or more languages or dialects in a single act of speech or writing (Canagarajah; Young and Martinez). For the BLFI activists, their code-meshing was not a dominant feature in their collaboratively written texts. Instead, more often than not they were integrating short, declarative sentences written in Swahili into a text that was predominately composed in Standard Written English. An example of this code-meshing practice can be seen in that same manifesto on the ASC controversy that the BLFI activists issued in November of 1969. One of the paragraphs in the manifesto is a declaration of their intent to remain diligent in their efforts to place the ASC under Black leadership and control. This declaration was written in both English and Swahili:

> No amount of repression will stop our struggle against imperialism, neocolonialism, and racism. Our struggle will continue until our people are free. Should our generation die in the course, another generation shall rise up to the historic task of liberating our people. Ours is to fight to the end. Lazima tutashihda bila Shaka!

Loosely translated, "lazima tutashihda bila Shaka" means "we must prevail course." When I asked Karega about this code-meshing practice, he characterized it as what Suresh Canagarajah describes as a voicing strategy. Reporting on his graduate student's code-meshing practices in a literacy narrative assignment, Canagarajah defines voicing strategies for code-meshing as "basing communication on one's own positionality and making textual spaces for one's linguistic strengths and resources" (404). For the BLFI activists, writing this paragraph in both English and Swahili—conveying their diligence to the struggle in both English and Swahili—was a strategy to construct for their audience a sense of unity among the BLFI activists and the representatives from PASOA. Recall that their work in placing the ASC under Black leadership was a collaborative endeavor with PASOA. Also recall the important relationships that were forged between the BLFI and PASOA and the translingual engagements that were taking place at The People's House, particularly surrounding the BLFI activists' learning of Swahili. Through this code-meshing act, the BLFI activists were presenting to the ASC's staff and MSU's administrators a Pan-African unified front.

By leaving the sentence written in Swahili untranslated, the BLFI activists were also voicing their agency as gatekeepers of the discipline of African Studies. The BLFI activists and PASOA representatives were always advocating for an increase in course offerings in Third World languages, particularly Pan-African languages, and they were consistently petitioning for the recruitment of faculty who could teach these courses. Moreover, the BLFI activists believed that the White scholars of the ASC had made very little effort to understand the cultural, linguistic, and political contexts that needed to inform and shape the research they were doing on the African continent. Karega

reflected on how they perceived the scholarship produced by the ASC:

> We saw their scholarship as very restrictive. If you can think about how the study of Black people in the United States has been done, for example, how sociologists were always coming into Black communities—and still coming—and always coming up with these ideas. That's just how we saw the work they were doing on the African continent. Folk who called themselves scholars were just parroting and helping neocolonial African governments.

In short, the untranslated sentence written in Swahili was a means for "calling out," as Karega explained, the ASC's staff and MSU's administrators by confronting them with their Otherness in relation to African culture and worldviews and in terms of the discipline of African Studies.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the history of the BLFI activists' political literacy education at The People's House highlights the continued importance of revisionist historiography, positioning these student-activists beyond discourses of basic writing and literacy remediation and providing insight into the role that politically-oriented critical reading and collaborative writing played in the literacy development of a community of Black student-activists in the late sixties and early seventies. Of course, there is more to be recovered and shared. Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, composed a body of written work that was widely read and circulated, particularly among political groups tied to the radical wings of Detroit labor politics in the sixties and seventies. Also compelling are the contexts for literacy education that Ernie Boone, the founder of the *Westside News*, constructed for the BLFI activists to learn the art of radical Black journalism. Boone, I would argue, functioned as what Deborah Brandt calls a sponsor of literacy. Finally, the BLFI activists' work with the *Mazungumzo* journal and their letter-writing activities in which they were writing proactively and responsively to MSU's administrators, need to be explored in more depth. These kinds of activities broaden the scope, shedding light on the BLFI activists' extracurricular engagements with academic scholarship and epistolary traditions.

But there are other implications for this recovered history that move us beyond the realm of historiography and beyond inquiries into how such a history can inform and shape the work we do in contemporary literacy and composition classrooms. When we encounter the public rhetorics of educators and administrators such as Lewis Mayhew and Geoffrey Wagner, it is readily apparent—or at least it should be—how and to what extent racist and classist ideologies and practices were forming the basis of those rhetorics. But in this current political moment, where Black students are proclaiming and demanding—not asking—that Black Lives Matter on and off campus, such rhetorics are being contemporized by some college administrators, educators, and students. The political activism of Black students is currently confronted with questions and critique, particularly in terms of its exigence and relevance to their experiences as college learners and their development as readers, writers, and critical thinkers and inquirers. Moreover, opposition has mounted against two of the top demands issued by Black students on college campuses across the country, which have focused on an increase in Black faculty and the construction of exclusively Black spaces and "safe spaces" on college campuses. The BLFI activists' political literacy education at The People's House

illustrates the importance of nonacademic political spaces to populations of students who often—still—are positioned on and regulated to the margins of academia. These are sites where Black students are carving out space so they can negotiate, define, and enact their political identities and practice literacy for political aims. The important role that C.L.R. James played in terms of the BLFI activists' emerging politics and their development as readers and writers also highlights the importance of relationships between Black students and Black faculty, activists, and community organizers. This is the kind of mentorship that often doesn't show up in the pages of CVs and resumes but is no less important, not only in terms of the ongoing development of Black students but also in terms of our development as Black scholars, educators, and activists.

Voices from the past are always integral to understanding our present conditions and future possibilities. If we are open—and ready—to listen.

NOTES

[1] Language deficit theories posited the pathology of non-standard dialects, suggested nonstandard dialects inhibit the cognitive development of their users, and argued the inadequacy of nonstandard dialects in comparison to Standard English.

[2] Eventually the BLFI evolved from solely a Black student organization into a community organization. Its headquarters was called the Marcus Garvey Institute, centrally located in Lansing, Michigan. With Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, leading the way, the political cadre working out of the Garvey Institute collaborated with the Peoples' Action Committee (PAC), a component of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). The political cadre was also active in the development of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), a distinctly Pan-African and internationalist organization. For more on the ALSC, see a compilation of the organization's primary documents in Appendix B-14 through B-20 in Modibo M. Kadalie, Internationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the Struggle of Social Classes. Savannah: One Quest Press, 2000, 621-668.

[3] The bulk of material I uncovered in MSU's Archives and Historical Collections was located in the Ruth S. Hamilton Collection. Ruth Hamilton joined MSU's Department of Sociology in 1968 and was a core faculty member in the African Studies Center and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. As the director of MSU's African Diaspora Research project for seventeen years, part of Ruth Hamilton's work also involved pushing against asymmetrical power relations, hegemonic values, and selective practices to create space for research that makes present the unmediated voices and perspectives of African peoples on the continent and throughout the diaspora. Hamilton's collection contains materials on university diversity programs and affirmative action at MSU, case studies of MSU conflicts and protests, newspaper clippings, academic papers written by Hamilton, and a small compilation of files on MSU's Black student organizations.

[4] The documents collected from Karega and Boone's personal archives include a diverse range of materials that catalogue and provide insight into the BLFI activists' reading and writing activities. In the Works Cited, the documents cited in this research that are directly related to or representative of their critical reading and collaborative writing practices at The People's House are listed.

[5] The first component of the oral history portion of this project was individual interviews in which I prompted interviewees' recollections by asking open-ended questions about the BLFI's political activism and the reading and writing practices that supported this activism. I conducted follow-up interviews using a tier of questions that I designed after transcribing this first set of interviews and interpreting the information gained. For example, it was during the first set of interviews that I learned about the kinds of reading and writing activities that were important to the BLFI activists' political work. During the first set of interviews, The People's House was also cited as an important space for the BLFI activists' critical reading and collaborative writing activities. Hence, in follow-up interviews with Karega and Johnson, I posed questions that specifically prompted them to reflect upon the BLFI activists' critical reading and collaborative writing practices and the contexts of production for a selected sampling of their written texts.

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Literacy Contact Zones:
A Framework for Research

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KEYWORDS

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The past few decades of literacy studies research have shown that literacy is inextricably related to history, speech, power dynamics, and language ideologies. However, few widely used conceptual frameworks for literacy research articulate these principles. To address this gap, I propose employing the linguistics concept of contact zones as a conceptual framework for literacy research because it foregrounds the contexts that have proven essential to literacy studies scholarship. These contexts are language diversity, history, orality, and power at more targeted and wider-ranging scales of focus. Mary Louise Pratt famously described contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (*Imperial Eyes* 7). This concept of contact zones has been used to theorize the political and power disparities present in sites—such as texts (Pratt) and classrooms (Lu)—where such influences might not be visible. A literacy contact zone framework for research would orient investigations of literacy in sociolinguistic and history-rich contextual understandings that assume asymmetrical power dynamics. Contact zones also have the benefit of several decades of debate in the field of composition, which has revealed the limitations and affordances of the concept for learning environments. As a model adopted from linguistics, contact zones are relevant to the often interdisciplinary and multi-sited research in literacy studies scholarship.

Contact zones, re-infused with their linguistic origins, articulate a concrete context in which literacy and literacy instruction exists and where language difference, orality, history, and power dynamics are at the forefront. They thus call for researchers to account for these contexts when studying literacy. In the humanities, contact zones originated in contact language and linguistic analyses. Pratt developed the idea of contact zones into an analytical tool for literary and comparative studies, and it quickly spread to other fields of study. Composition scholars have paved the way for understanding contact zones not just as spaces to observe and describe but also as spaces in which counterhegemonic learning and instruction can occur.

> *"Contact zones, re-infused with their linguistic origins, articulate a concrete context in which literacy and literacy instruction exists and where language difference, orality, history, and power dynamics are at the forefront."*

I draw upon the work of Pratt and composition studies, which treat contact zones as a metaphor for observing other discursive phenomena, but I also connect contact zones to its even more concrete meaning for linguistics research in language contact and creolization. In a linguistic contact zone, different languages interact via writing, reading, speech, and other expressions. These interactions are inextricably connected to economic and geopolitical forces and have greater and lesser privileges afforded to them on account of these historical contexts.

This essay begins by tracing studies that have established essential contexts for responsibly understanding literacy. I argue that these seminal works particularly highlight the importance of history and orality contexts, which are two of the contexts I propose taking up in a contact zone framework for literacy research. I next turn to composition studies, where scholars have teased out useful lessons and cautions about using contact zones as a metaphor for writing classes. This section brings to light what compositionists have revealed about the significance of language differences and power dynamics, which are the third and fourth contexts I attribute to a contact zone framework. A final section provides a brief glance into three literacy contexts in which a contact zone analytical frame illuminates potential blind spots in the complex situations surrounding literacy and literacy instruction: UNESCO's website, a popular literacy campaign in Nicaragua, and the languages of schooling in Haiti. By building this model of contact zones with history, orality, language difference, and power dynamics as central contexts for forging literacy research, I aim to capture important contributions from different disciplines to the study of literacy. I further hope to reinvigorate the concept of contact zones by emphasizing its sociolinguistic roots, in which contact zones represent actual spaces of language and other exchanges rather than metaphors of interaction and conflict.

Contexts and Models in Literacy Studies

Scholars have examined literacy through the lenses of language difference, orality, history, and power dynamics since the late 1970s. Rather than propose a new approach to literacy research, I argue that a contact zone framework brings together the analytical insights that have been successful in the field of literacy studies. That is, insights about literacy ranging from identifying research methods for teachers to better understand their students' language backgrounds to distinguishing between the effects of schooling and literacy are only revealed through careful attention to linguistic, historical, oral, and power-dynamic contexts. Shirley Brice Heath carefully documented the oral language practices and differences of Trackton and Roadville Carolina residents when she was tasked with advising elementary school teachers to work with a newly integrated student population in *Ways with Words*. Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole studied literacy instruction among the Vai in Liberia. They performed tests for certain cognitive functions and determined that schooling had a greater impact than literacy on abstraction, memory, logic, taxonomic categorization, and perceived objectivity of language. Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff's edited collection of literacy campaign research attested that the desire to transform and reform a population through literacy instruction dates back at least to the Protestant Reformation's push to provide biblical instruction in the contemporary standard German language rather than Latin. Today's mass literacy campaigns contain similar

appeals to the "power" of reading and writing—and even mathematics and computer programming —to overcome social, political, and geographic exclusion as well as economic inequalities.

As research in literacy studies continues to draw upon and impact work in multiple disciplines, several prominent scholars in the field have called for new organizing models. The argument I make here for a contact zone framework for research recognizes the exigency for advancing best practices in literacy research with a concept that can renew the focus on important contextual details related to literacy and issues of power. Some of the more recent models for literacy with a similar aim include David Barton's *ecological literacy*, Fernandez's *rhizome*, and Jan Blommaert's *grassroots literacy*. These concepts have made headway towards disrupting simplistic patterns of analysis, and I propose a contact zone framework with a similar result in mind but with a particular interest in making the contexts of literacy research both conceptually concrete and interactive rather than fixed.[1] The inaugural issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies* (*LiCS*) showcased scholars from across literacy- and composition-related fields and methodologies who surveyed research questions and tensions that came before and pointed towards future inquiry. Each of the symposium and symposium response articles stressed the importance of context, whether that referred to location in or outside of school, national borders, history, ideology, or power. Their discussions emphasized several of the contextual focuses this article proposes to highlight with contact zones, including power, history, language and literacy diversities, and avoiding exaggerated divisions like literacy/ orality (see especially Graff; Viera; Flannery; Parks; Trainor; and Qualley). Steve Parks called for "a different model" for characterizing literacy's dynamic embeddedness (43). Donna Qualley moved most clearly towards a framework that avoids "the mental inertia," which occurs, as she explained, "[w]hen our terms and concepts no longer function as threshold concepts, portals that enable further movement" (50-51). Qualley suggested that Hilary Janks's "four orientations" offer some guidance for scholars of literacy and composition. These are domination, access, diversity, and design (Qualley 51). By keeping these orientations equally in sight, researchers can combine the expertise of both literacy and composition studies. (Qualley extended Janks's warning that leaving out one orientation skews the balanced picture of literacy). This is a promising direction that articulates a clear set of tensions emerging from research insights and also pushes back against scholarly blind spots. I wish to continue this conversation in *LiCS* about seeking productive frameworks that can jar researchers out of conceptual theoretical ruts and "divides" related to literacy by exploring what sets of tensions emerge, what "traps" can be avoided, and what connections can be created between literacy and composition studies if we take contact zones as a framework for literacy research.

Recent research in literacy studies has reinforced the importance of place—geography, physical location—for interpretations of literacies. Two studies in particular have sought to renew attention to place as an important context for understanding literacy in school achievement and in implementing learner-centered pedagogy in Tanzania. These educational researchers emphasized tensions similar to contact zones under different conceptual models. Jerome E. Morris and Carla R. Monroe argued that studies of educational achievement by African-American students must consider the "race/place nexus" and, in particular, understand "the South as a critical racial, cultural, political, and economic backdrop in Black education" (21). They demonstrated that closer attention to language patterns,

"geographies of opportunities," historical migrations, and factors that shape regional identities lead to richer understandings of education research. They also implored scholars to "ground their studies in comprehensive analyses of the social contexts in which student achievement occurs" (31). Literacy contact zones demand precisely this sort of grounding, building upon best practices in literacy studies scholarship. Morris and Monroe's "race/place nexus" highlights some of the tensions that Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus developed with their "vertical case study" conceptual framework for research. The vertical case study entails a three-part analysis, which includes, "a 'vertical' attention across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, or scales; a 'horizontal' comparison of how policies unfold in distinct locations; and a 'transversal,' processual analysis of the creative appropriation of educational policies across time" (Bartlett and Vavrus 131). While the name "vertical case study" is a bit misleading given the equally important "horizontal" and "transversal" components, this framework invites research strategies as robust as Morris and Monroe's call for more in-depth discussion of region and identity. A literacy contact zones framework insists on a similar attention to multiple levels of context, comparison, and history but also accounts for interaction, a distinction I develop below. Keeping these models of richly contextualized literacy investigations in mind, I offer contact zones as a framework for understanding the complex contexts in which literacy exists.

From Great Divides to Contextual Dynamics: Literacy Studies Research on History and Orality

Among the most lasting legacies of literacy studies scholarship are ongoing projects to reject arbitrary divides. In the late 1960s and 1970s, scholars began to earnestly reject exaggerated claims about the separateness between literacy and orality that overstated literacy's singularity among other unhelpful assumptions. They urged instead for investigators to see literacy in two overlooked contexts: history and orality. Researchers in anthropology, history, and linguistics sought to complicate the "great divide" between literacy and orality, especially as conceived in the 1960s by Jack Goody and Ian Watt. Kate Vieira has since noted that Goody and Watt themselves were responding to the challenges that writing posed to traditional divides between anthropological and sociological research. To Goody and Watt, discussing literacy and non-literacy could address the political backlash to the terminology of "primitive" and "civilized" (Vieira 26). Brian Street offered his concept of "ideological literacy" in response to studies by Goody and Watt, Walter Ong, David Olson, Eric Havelock, and others who claimed that literacy had significant impacts or "consequences" on the human psyche. Arguments such as those made by Goody and Watt claiming, "one invention, the invention of writing, . . . changed the whole structure of the cultural tradition" (67) fell under Street's "autonomous" model of literacy. Such arguments relied on a notion of literacy as superior to orality and as having universal "consequences" on persons and societies who become literate apart from the contexts, beliefs, and meanings ascribed to literacy. As an alternative to this, Street proposed a view of literacy as "ideological," which highlighted "literacy practices as inextricably linked to

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cultural and power structures in society and [encouraged researchers] to recognise the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts" ("The New Literacy Studies" 433-34). With a similar concern, Harvey J. Graff looked at archival data in nineteenth-century Canada and further disproved such "consequences" of literacy, proposing instead the existence of "literacy myths." Recognizing myths and ideologies points us towards more nuanced understandings of the connection among different literacies and their social, historical, political, cultural, and economic contexts. Contact zones point in even more direct ways to specific contexts that literacy researchers have sought to make central to literacy investigations. Furthermore, a contact zone framework focuses on the interaction of elements that have historically been separated by scholarship, including orality/literacy and local/global/translocal components related to literacy .

Before looking at other studies of literacy in oral and historical contexts, I want to note that Street's rejection of direct and reliable "consequences" for literacy potentially creates a new divide between "autonomous" and "ideological" literacy models. Unlike orality and literacy, whose division leads us to ignore the interrelation between them, the distinction between autonomous and ideological paradoxically asks investigators to understand that literacy is actually always ideological while proposing "autonomous" as a model for (falsely) decontextualized literacy. Linguistic anthropology faced similar conceptual and terminological limitations in the 1990s, when observers were too quick to accept complex notions of "culture" and "language" as the results of neutral or "natural" processes. Reflecting on the emerging response to this trend, Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin suggested that to counter the "naturalizing move that drains the conceptual of its historical content", language theorists should embrace "the term ideology [which] reminds us that the cultural conceptions we study are partial, contestable and contested, and interest-laden" (58). Street offered a similar intervention but introduced the term "autonomous" to label an inaccurate treatment of literacy characterized by viewing literacy out of context. In Street's words, "[t]he skills and concepts that accompany literacy acquisition, in whatever form, do not stem in some automatic way from the inherent qualities of literacy, as some authors would have us believe, but are aspects of a specific ideology" (*Literacy* 1). When authors make claims about literacy's impacts apart from contexts and beliefs, they are also under the influence of ideology: "[t]he 'autonomous' model is […] constructed for a specific political purpose" (Street 19).[2] In spite of such claims, then, autonomous discussions of literacy do not escape the ideological contexts that inform all interpretations of literacy.

In Figure 1, I illustrate what Street's conceptual framework entails. Bruce Horner captured the complexity of this theoretical move: "the autonomous model is powerful in claiming an autonomy for literacy that hides its ideological character, purporting to offer literacy as an ideologically neutral phenomenon" (1). Horner continued: "[b]y contrast, what Street calls the 'ideological' model of literacy takes the ideological character of all literacy and its study, and hence takes conflict, as inevitable givens" (Horner 1). Subsequent studies have found Street's "ideological" literacy model useful for framing an interrogation of beliefs about literacy (see recent works by Budd et al. and Camangian). Like most scholarship on literacy since Street, Graff, Heath, and others challenged these unquestioned beliefs about literacy, a contact zones framework acknowledges that all views of literacy are ideological. Rather than discuss autonomous literacy as distinct from ideological

literacy—since Street and Horner tell us that both are ideological—a contact zone analysis engages history, orality, language difference, and power as contexts for literacy to help researchers delve into the specific workings of ideologies. If we look historically at literacy, what Street described as ideological literacy is the only responsible way to characterize the various uses, concepts, and pay-offs literacy has held throughout history.
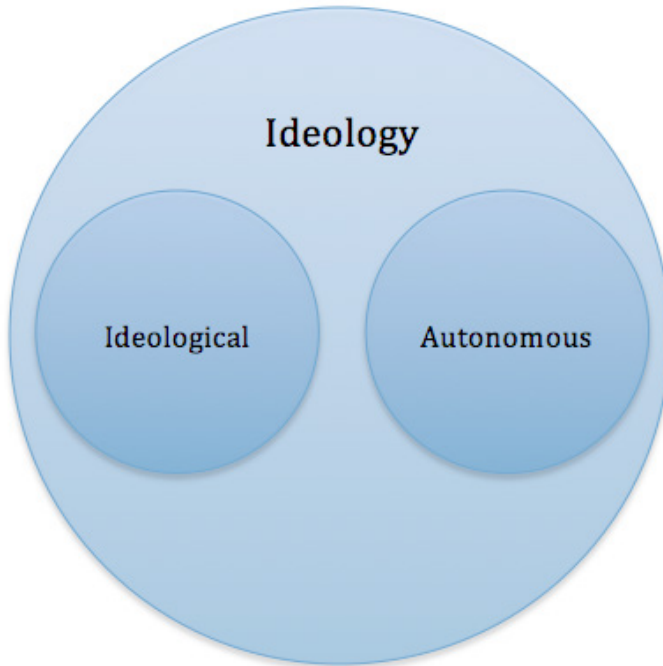

Figure 1. Visualization of Street's ideological and autonomous literacy.

Since Goody and Watt, a number of important studies of literacy in specific contexts have highlighted the erratic uses and values of literacy historically, all of which point to the ongoing relationship between literacy and orality and ultimately the importance of attending to history. Old Testament scholar David Carr has demonstrated that for ancient Israelites, literacy could not be entrusted with the important task of transmitting religious teachings to future generations in the ancient Near East. Though it appears logical, by today's understanding of written records, that such texts could effectively pass on teachings, Carr asserted that for the Israelites, "[w]ritten copies of texts served a subsidiary purpose . . . as numinous symbols of the hallowed ancient tradition, as learning aids, and as reference points to insure accurate performance" (18). Writing did not supplant orality in the ancient Near East, and thus literacy was only necessary as a subset of learning skills focused more on memorization. This correlates with William V. Harris's research in ancient Greece and Rome. After taking into account a variety of "economic, social or ideological" and political "forces" in the ancient Greco-Roman world, Harris argued that such "vital preconditions for wide diffusion of

literacy were always absent" (12). Further, Harris suggested, "In most places most of the time, there was no incentive for those who controlled the allocation of resources to aim for mass literacy" (13). Studies of medieval uses and treatments of literacy by Michael Clanchy, Joyce Coleman, and Ruth Finnegan also offer evidence of the persistence of orality and halting adoption of writing in specific historical contexts.

These early examples of emerging roles for writing remind us that literacy did not supplant but rather interacted with and depended upon orality. Literacy had to gain use-values in every context in which it eventually thrived. If researchers look for both, they will find literacy interacting with speech in instruction, reading performances, and everyday negotiations of texts' meanings and contexts. A contact zone framework calls for attention to both history and orality. Language contact occurs because of socio-historical events and happens through verbal exchanges. If literacy is viewed as embedded in contact zones, then researchers must search beyond accepted beliefs about writing and literacy instruction. Looking at oral and historical contexts raises questions of interaction rather than division: why does a particular literacy, genre, or text hold significance for a group of people?

Even with this brief glance into the early involvement of literacy in people's lives, we can recognize a stark contrast between the somewhat ambivalent entry of literacy into these ancient and medieval societies and today's widespread enthusiasm for literacy. Unlike ancient and medieval incorporations of literacy into religious and practical contexts dominated by non-written approaches, literacy has become a quality valued not just for specific activities in context but as a status so desirable to philanthropic groups and individuals that it mobilizes global initiatives. Studies by Mary Jo Maynes and Harvey Graff have shown that by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, literacy took on more lofty and abstract notions. Indeed, literacy was sufficiently isolated from immediate contexts and particularities by the 1960s that scholars could publish serious studies about the role literacy played in *bringing about* democracy and modern notions of reflectiveness and critical thinking (Goody and Watt; Ong; Havelock). Of course, literacy's meaning always depended on the values and associations of literacy with notions like "progress" held by institutions and communities (Graff). The longer history of literacy should give scholars pause before isolating literacy from its current and historical oral surroundings.

One significant call for change in our conceptions of literacy and scope of research was Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton's article "Limits of the Local." As their title suggests, Brandt and Clinton challenged the trend that emerged in response to the universalizing gestures in scholarship by Goody and Watt, in which researchers sought to document local literacies or literacies in more targeted contexts. In this critique, the authors attempted to disrupt an emerging "great divide" between local and global contexts for literacy (338). To do so, they reconfigured Street's term "autonomous" to describe not the elision of context from a discussion of literacy but autonomous literacy as a "transcontextual" component of literacy that spans multiple locations. They proposed "to grant the technologies of literacy certain kinds of undeniable capacities—particularly, a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact, and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events" (344). Seeking the transcontextual "thingness" of literacy is an intriguing move for literacy researchers to make insofar as it enables a view of contexts for literacy that feature interactions

between peoples, media, ideologies, and other exchanges within and across communities. However, in highlighting the ways literacy is infused with specific and immediate uses and practices as well as more wide-ranging significances, Brandt and Clinton raised questions about this new autonomous literacy's relation to Street's original configuration. Is autonomous literacy decontextualized or transcontextual? Does literacy have to lose its contextual meanings in order to travel? Street himself urged those who used Brandt and Clinton's work to examine "distant" literacies rather than autonomous ones. In "Limits of the Local: 'Autonomous' or 'Disembedding'?" Street argued that "[t]

he features of distant literacies are actually no more autonomous than those of local literacies, or indeed than any literacy practices" (2826). In other words, literacy already has a transcontextual "thingness," or meanings that do not wholly derive from an immediate or "local" context. Rather than assign literacy a transcontextual

"As with orality and literacy, 'local' and 'global' are terms that describe different features of social experiences, which do exist, but have become exaggerated categories that prevent more dynamic understandings of circulations and scales related to literacy. "

label, we might ask what seems to hold true about literacy practice, literacy's relationship to orality, and literacy's perceived value across contexts? Such questions highlight interaction within context—central features of a conceptual space like a contact zone that is defined by speakers of different languages communicating using varieties of resources. The focus on interaction again avoids pitfalls of the second "great" divide that Brandt and Clinton identify in literacy research between "local" and "global" contexts and phenomena. As with orality and literacy, "local" and "global" are terms that describe different features of social experiences. Differences related to literacy and geographic spaces do exist, but "global" and "local" have become exaggerated categories that prevent more dynamic understandings of circulations and scales related to literacy.

To demonstrate the limitations I find in the above concepts, I will turn briefly to a narrative that illustrates a belief about literacy that, while not supported by research, nevertheless had real consequences for the people involved. In March 2015 I interviewed a primary school teacher in southern Haiti as part of my research on literacy volunteer preparation. My interview questions focused on what the interlocutor thought would best prepare someone from outside of Haiti to work with Haitian teachers. I ended each interview with questions about the number of children who attended school in the area, how many of their parents might have attended school, what people in the area read and wrote, and so forth. This particular teacher shared a story in response to my question, "if I were an adult living in this area, what kind of things would I need to be able to read and write?" After offering some examples of landowners throwing away deeds and difficulties conducting and documenting vending at the market, she told me about her mother, who was a highly regarded servant for a woman in the nearby city. That woman's sister lived in Miami. When the sister came to visit them in Haiti, the sister was impressed with the servant and wanted to take her, the interlocutor's mother, to Miami. Here is our interpreter's explanation of what happened next:

> But she couldn't or she didn't [take the mother to Miami] because she didn't know how to read and write. So that's—that has a major impact on her. […] She said that that was a big loss for her. That was probably the biggest loss because everybody wants to travel. […] She

> [the interlocutor] said even herself, then she wouldn't be born here she would be born—. Yeah, yeah, she said she doesn't regret that she's Haitian, but she would've been born in a different country. Because of that, then, the husband of the lady at whose house she was a servant decided to sell her. (Primary schoolteacher, Personal interview)

Not being able to read and write for this interlocutor meant that her mother missed an opportunity to travel and perhaps even relocate to the United States. Insufficient literacy in this case truly changed the life of the mother, who even lost her job as a result of the interaction with the Miami-based relative of her employer. There is much to unpack here.

This story may appear to demonstrate Brandt and Clinton's view of autonomous aspects of literacy that can be "transcontextual." Actual travel—a politically significant 650-mile trip across the Caribbean—is linked directly to literacy, but literacy does not work here as Brandt and Clinton suggest, with "a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact, and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events" (344). What is traveling and influencing travel is a *belief about literacy*—a literacy myth through which the sister from Miami equated some level of skill in reading or writing with the ability to succeed as a domestic employee. I don't think we can characterize this story as representing autonomous understandings of literacy in Street's definition of autonomous: "broad generali[zations]," "assum[ing] a single direction" for "literacy development" and "individual liberty and social mobility," or as "isolate[ing] literacy as an independent variable and then claim[ing] to be able to study [or know] its consequences" (*Literacy* 1-2). The belief that literacy was a stipulation for bringing this Haitian worker to the United States as a personal employee is heavily dependent on context —even if this was an excuse for other reasons this person had to deny taking the worker to Miami. Indeed, the two sisters clearly differed in their views about whether literacy was necessary for a domestic worker though they appear to have shared similar appreciation for this worker's other qualities. Configurations of power across class, nationality, and gender are central to this context (it is intriguing that the storyteller attributes her mother's dismissal by the husband of her employer to the rejection by the Miami-based sister). History is equally important, including the relationship between Miami (and the U.S.) and Haiti, the geopolitic that contribute to Haiti's current political and economic situation, and the different social values of work and vocations.[3] As another example at the end of this essay will demonstrate, language difference and orality are particularly important for understanding literacy in Haiti. However tacit and unspoken such contextual factors may be, I do not take this story's literacy myth or belief to constitute the denial of context or ideology.

Literacy research needs a new model that articulates the underlying methodological perspectives that the field has developed from multiple disciplines, including attention to history, language differences, orality, and power. Apart from compelling researchers towards rich descriptions of contexts, contact zones can connect literacy scholarship to practice through their applications in writing classrooms by composition studies.

Contact Zones in Composition:
Theorizing Language Difference and Power in Writing Classrooms

Composition scholars have used contact zones to think about classrooms, curricula, and texts in ways that highlight language differences and power dynamics. Their theorization of contact zones for writing instruction opens additional paths for literacy researchers to apply a contact zone framework to discuss literacy instruction in addition to literacy practices. Contact zones entered academic conversations in the 1990s as a cross-disciplinary concept that was quickly taken up by writing instructors. Mary Louise Pratt drew upon a creole linguistics concept to propose that interpreting travel writing produced in multicultural colonial spaces entailed examining the "arts" of contact zones. Following Pratt's suggestion in 1991 to "[look] for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone" (40), compositionists evaluated the merits of using contact zones as a framework for thinking about language difference in classrooms, inclusive literature curricula, and hostile viewpoints in student writing (Canagarajah; Bizzel; Miller). This was a robust (and ongoing) discussion that stemmed from the cross-disciplinary orientation of contact zones themselves. For composition pedagogy, contact zones have been a productive locus upon which to resituate and rethink multiple student competencies and language differences in the classroom. Such conversations would be useful for the field of literacy studies, which has been grappling with similar contentions and contradictions regarding diverse language speakers and privileged literacies (Kynard; Young; Canagarajah; Lu and Horner). In addition, compositionists, building on Pratt's application of contact zones to historical and colonial texts, have shown that contact zones can apply to contexts dealing with legacies of colonialism across the globe, including classrooms in the present-day United States.

Pratt offered her model of contact zones to instructors of literacy as an alternative to what she viewed as a homogenizing model of "community" in instructional theory and practice ("Arts" 34). It was Pratt's 1991 speech and essay "Arts of the Contact Zone" that commanded composition scholars' attention in particular. As with her view of literary texts (expressed in a similar quotation above), Pratt argued for a vision of classrooms and school-based writing as "writing and literacy in [. . .] social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). The "literate arts of the contact zone" referred to works from a number of marginalized writers as well as to genres like parody, critique, autoethnography, and transculturation (36). Such writing risks miscomprehension, becoming "unread masterpieces," and "absolute heterogeneity of meaning" (36). Students enter classrooms with multiple identities, interests, and historical relationships to texts and to one another. To seek homogeneity or "horizontal alliance" in a classroom is to ignore and erase these differences and to subscribe to an academic vision of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" in which "universally shared literacy is also part of the picture" (Pratt 38). Pratt encouraged instructors to resist projecting such a leveling community in the classroom by selecting a variety of dominant and non-dominant texts and to search for pedagogies that consider cultural mediation and facilitate multiple encounters with the "ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others" (40). With this, Pratt ignited a series of debates

and questions regarding the uses and limits of contact zones in classrooms.

For the field of composition studies, contact zones offered a useful language-based concept for generating questions about pedagogy and language difference that engaged issues of history and power. Composition studies in the 1990s featured debates about whether writing classrooms were becoming spaces for instructors to spread "dogma," "politics," "ideology," and their own "social goals" instead of what Maxine Hairston suggested as a preferable focus: "diversity," "craft," "critical thinking," and "the educational needs of students" (698). Calls to separate politics from writing instruction came amidst discussions of new models for composition in multimodal formats, the ongoing challenge of the 1974 Conference on College Composition and Communication resolution to affirm "Students' Right to Their Own Language," and renewed outcries about literacy "crises" (Gee 29). The benefit of contact zones since their introduction in composition studies is that they call attention to the complex political and social histories surrounding language difference and remind us that the choices that individuals make in writing, speaking, and design involve unequal access to power.

College writing classrooms became an area where discussions of contact zones facilitated important questions in the theory and practice of composition. In her landmark essay, "Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone," Min-Zhan Lu described a classroom discussion about a piece of student writing that included the non-standard construction "can able" in an essay. Her article shows that Lu achieved several aims of Pratt's somewhat elusive "pedagogical arts of the contact zone" (Pratt 40) by assigning Haunani-Kay Trask's "From a Native Daughter" and by assuming (and encouraging) students' own non-standard usages to be intentional meaning making choices. Lu then invited other students to consider the rhetorical effectiveness of the "can able" usage and asked them to suggest whether the writer should keep it or how to change it for a particular purpose. By bringing this text and its multiple meanings into the classroom for serious critical discussion instead of ignoring or offering a more standard version of the construction, Lu created a space that allowed for multiple voices in writing and for negotiation and dissent—grappling—with how to write and read in a contact zone.

Other considerations of contact zones in the classroom explored both the opportunities and challenges that this concept offered when it was used, following Pratt's lead, as a metaphor. Patricia Bizzell proposed to arrange English courses around "historically defined contact zones, moments when different groups within the society contend for the power to interpret what is going on" (483). Cynthia L. Selfe and Richard J. Selfe leveraged the colonial critique central to contact zones to teachers and programmers of digital interfaces with the aim of "identify[ing] some of the effects of domination and colonialism associated with computer use" (482). Richard E. Miller prompted contact zone enthusiasts to consider their "competing commitments" to contact zone-style grappling when confronted with student writing and opinions expressing violence or hatred towards a group of people (392). Suresh Canagarajah's application of contact zones in college writing classrooms considered the role of safe houses and language use in written and online student communication. He suggested that students from historically marginalized communities do not uniformly resist dominant discourses and literacies but that they learn accommodation practices as well. Canagarajah

pointed out the differences between the way the students in his "college preview" summer class deployed resistant, vernacular, and multi-vocal writing in the class's online forum but not in other writing for the course. Despite his attempt to encourage students to use the languages in which they felt most confident in their formal written assignments, Canagarajah saw the students deploy much more typical academic approaches to writing. He posited that students utilized a kind of "fronting" in leaving behind vernacular uses for language they saw as more academic. Both Lu and Canagarajah took seriously their students' diverse literacies and range of options for writing. Contact zones have been sources of dialogue and debate about what to do with difference in classrooms but have not resolved these concerns. Contact zones do, however, offer a framework for bringing these differences into the foreground and for attending to the historical contexts and "asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 34).

Like Miller, Joseph Harris raised important questions and critiques of contact zones. Harris listed his concerns that contact zones emphasize division amongst students and distance students from one another, raise difficult practical questions for teachers, invite superficial encounters, and "romanticize the expression of dissent" (165). Rather than emphasize difference and conflict alone, Harris proposed the city as a model for recognizing difference, one within which teachers could "[urge] writers not simply to defend the cultures into which they were born but to imagine new public spheres they'd like to have a hand in making" (169). A city, unlike a contact zone, invites "allegiance" and gives people who may be very different from one another a reason to work together (163). Harris's model of a city has several strengths. Like contact zones, cities are inhabited by diverse populations. Unlike communities, which both Harris and Pratt reject, cities and contact zones don't assume resolution is the end goal of teaching, writing, or classroom discussions. To address these valid concerns while retaining the productive challenges to "[treat] difference as an asset, not a liability" (Bizzell 483), discussions of contact zones would benefit from considering the sociolinguistic origins of Pratt's concept. Part of the clashing and grappling involves linguistic innovation and incorporation across differences (Nelde; J.G. Heath; Darquennes). These negotiations continue to occur because speakers of different languages continue to interact. Writing and literacy instruction takes place in these dynamic oral contexts, which need not be treated metaphorically—researchers in composition as well as literacy can look for the historical, oral, language diverse, and power differentiated contexts that surround actual instruction and practice.

"Such negotiations continue to take place because speakers of different languages continue to interact. Writing and literacy instruction takes place in these dynamic oral contexts, which need not be treated metaphorically—researchers in composition as well as literacy can look for the historical, oral, language diverse, and power differentiated contexts that surround actual instruction and practice."

Contact zones continue to be a relevant and challenging model for understanding the contexts and possibilities of language and literacy differences in composition as well as literacy, but using contact zones as metaphors can be limiting. Ellen Cushman and Chalon Emmons used Pratt's concept of contact zones to theorize a service-learning course in which their students worked with a

local YMCA. Cushman and Emmons defined contact zones somewhat narrowly as a proxy for cross-cultural engagement, using Pratt's model. The authors' critiques point to an important limitation of only using Pratt's definition of contact zones. Cushman and Emmons explained their concern with Pratt's contact zones, which could cause "[t]exts and class discussion about them [to] become the operative means for providing 'contact' with other value systems" (204). While Canagarajah and Lu would view the classroom with students reading such texts as already a contact zone, Cushman and Emmons focused on the texts as creating a contact zone. This more specific application of contact zones to learning environments led Cushman and Emmons to intervene in contact zone theory. They saw the harmful potential for "superficial social interaction" in which readers have little stake in engaging with the "grappling" and negotiation of contact zones produced by texts. As an alternative, they suggested that community engagement created a more immediate context for interaction across social differences and for experiential learning (205). Their title, "Contact Zones Made Real," reiterates their primary theoretical intervention with Pratt. Linguistic contact zones *are* "real" in the sense that languages do come into contact with one another, and scholars can use this phenomenon as a lens to better understand literacy. However, as Cushman and Emmons—like Harris and Miller—caution, literacy researchers and instructors should be wary of the pitfalls of using contact zones only as metaphors for cross-cultural encounters.

Though Joseph Harris dubbed Pratt "the patron theorist of composition" for current conversations in the field (161), Pratt neither invented nor is the sole owner of contact zones. "Contact zone" describes a linguistic situation in which different languages interact with and borrow from one another. It is a language-focused and cross-disciplinary concept, which I argue makes it a rich conceptual and methodological framework for literacy studies and perhaps an opportunity for renewed attention by compositionists. It offers an approach to investigating literacy instruction that transcends binaries such as local, global/translocal, oral, and literate. This happens because issues of language diversity, social, political, and historical contexts, and individual agency are just as central to the study of literacy as they are to teaching writing, and a contact zone framework offers a way to view these issues as interrelated. In addition, contact zones facilitate dialogue with other disciplines including composition studies, sociolinguistics, pidgin and creole linguistics, history, literature, comparative studies, and education. Given the productive debate that contact zones have facilitated in composition studies and the linguistic focus that contact zones maintain, studies of literacy in any context can benefit from considering the sets of issues and questions that a contact zone framework would encourage.

Literacy Contact Zones

Set within the contexts of history, language difference, orality, and power differentials, contact zones foreground interaction rather than divides. This emphasis on interaction disrupts some potential misunderstandings of complex literacy situations. This section presents three cases in which attending to the contexts and interactions that a contact zone framework made visible allowed me to pose more nuanced questions about the particular dynamics I was observing. All three cases here

involve textual analysis that was a precursor to a larger project I am currently working on in which I use contact zones as an analytical framework for a comparative case study of literacy volunteer preparation in two organizations working in the U.S. South and in Haiti. The first case examines UNESCO's website and makes visible orality. If literacy is viewed as embedded in contact zones, then much of the language and other cultural circulation takes place in a vibrant oral context. Orality is necessary in linguistic contact zones where languages and cultures are not shared and where pidgin and creole languages emerge from these oral exchanges. The second case points to the major affordance of this framework, as contact zones are by definition the dynamic interaction between the immediate and the wider-ranging uses and meanings of literacy (or the micro and macro scales in Bartlett and Vavrus's work)[4]. This example revisits scholarship on a famous Paulo Freire-inspired literacy campaign in Nicaragua. It reminds us that the circulation of literacy must be associated with the ongoing colonizing project when viewed through a contact zone framework. As such, the oral, literate, and ideological practices that are imported must be assessed for their complicity with continued colonization and imperialism. Finally, these immediate and more wide-ranging elements of literacy and orality are not fixed or absolute but rather constantly negotiated, as the third case in Haiti highlights.

UNESCO's website uses an intriguing combination of immediate and wider-ranging elements of literacy. As an international governmental organization, UNESCO relies on literacy having a "translocal" value in order to make global statements about its necessity. We see the wide-ranging view of literacy clearly in statements such as this: "For individuals, families, and societies alike, [literacy] is an instrument of empowerment to improve one's health, one's income, and one's relationship with the world" ("Literacy"). UNESCO.org also affirms more immediate understandings of literacy in policies: "[a]t the country level, UNESCO encourages the implementation of policies that are relevant to distinctive national contexts, in line with the commitments endorsed by the international community such as the six Education for All goals" ("Literacy: Policy"). This same page offers a bulleted list of different ways of "[p]roviding service while respecting diversity of context," which include "[l]inking formal and non-formal approaches to education" ("Literacy: Policy"). The immediate contexts of literacy, which are barely visible from the vantage point of UNESCO's global policy-making, are entirely dependent on the wide-ranging concept UNESCO sets forth that "[l]iteracy is a fundamental human right" ("Literacy"). Though pushing for collaboration with communities and local practices, UNESCO sees literacy as part of the abstract mission for global peace and equality. "Illiteracy," UNESCO claims, "is an obstacle to a better quality of life, and can even breed exclusion and violence" ("Literacy").

In spite of the universalizing rhetoric about literacy that UNESCO deploys in its website, viewing the role of immediate and wider-ranging literacy practices through the lens of a contact zone offers additional illumination. Though UNESCO treats literacy as empowering, asking how immediate and wider-ranging literacies will "meet, clash, and grapple with each other . . . in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" casts a very different light on this mission (Pratt, *Imperial* 7). In affirming the wide-ranging value of literacy, UNESCO disenfranchises the immediate. It is the wider-ranging view of literacy that UNESCO privileges in setting goals and

deciding what to do about the "distinctive national contexts" it encounters: quite an imperial project. Though literacy can contribute to different democratic and gender equality efforts (see Cody; Bartlett), assuming that wide-ranging literacy initiatives can navigate any context and achieve these laudable results leaves little room for local needs and immediate literate and oral practices. Viewing these immediate contexts for literacy as contact zones troubles and exposes the compelling narrative about literacy that UNESCO constructs. A contact zone framework would urge us to consider the negotiations—Pratt's clashing and grappling. As with colonized groups experiencing unfamiliar languages in a linguistic contact zone, communities who participate in UNESCO literacy initiatives must negotiate wide-ranging values and understandings of literacy, all of which will take place in a dynamic oral environment. UNESCO's website already leaves room for both immediate and wide-ranging literacies, but without a theoretical model to interrogate the power dynamic between these disparate spaces and literacies, the wide ranging slips into a dominating role. A contact zone framework highlights the interaction of people and interaction within and between components of contexts, such as power and orality. This framework pushes back against fixed views of literacy that often propel literacy campaigns, including UNESCO's (Arnove and Graff; Street, *Literacy*). Finally, a contact zone lens foregrounds power dynamics, history, language difference, and orality—all of which are central in creating linguistic contact zones.

In contrast to the international governmental organization, UNESCO, the literacy campaign that accompanied the first year of revolution in Nicaragua appeared to include indigenous languages in its efforts to rapidly increase the national adult literacy rate. Examining the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade with a contact-zone focus on interactions and contexts reveals additional complications between immediate and wider-circulating beliefs about literacy as well as—once again—asymmetries of power, especially as they relate to language ideologies. Jane Freeland analyzes the Nicaraguan literacy campaign of 1979 and 1980, which was mobilized by the new Sandinista government and inspired by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freeland's article in the *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* calls attention to the rise of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and its conflicts with the Costeños on the Atlantic Coast. Freeland suggests that scholars do not pay enough attention to the role that language debates played in the Sandinista/Costeño conflict (214). Language became an essential element and even substitute for different ethnicities during this period. With a volatile political backdrop, "linguistic purism" coincided with national support for the anti-Anglo/imperial and pro-Mestizo government, and thus "'rescuing' and maintaining language" equated "rescuing and maintaining 'culture'" (220). The National Literacy Crusade initiated by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación National (FSLN) promoted Freirian *conscientization* and unity through the national language of Spanish. The united indigenous Costeños, however, demanded bilingual literacy (221), and the Sandinista regime obliged them by designating local groups as leaders of the English language literacy initiative. Costeños were permitted to develop their own exercises based on Freire's *conscientización* lessons but were not allowed to generate their own terms or lessons. Though given literacy materials to translate into bilingual English and Spanish lessons, the Creole translators used subtle resistance approaches, such as changing the images accompanying the lesson or using ambiguous terms in English that could support a counter claim of Costeño unity

as opposed to the national unity byline of the FSLN.

If the contact zone model enabled a greater understanding of the power dynamics behind UNESCO's rhetoric, in the Nicaraguan literacy crusade it reminds us that language and literacy practices of the (immediate) disempowered Costeños as well as the incoming (wider-ranging) Sandinista regime are intimately related to negotiations of language ideologies.[5] Even *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can be used for coercive purposes of erasure when its dialogic ideals are mobilized under the guise of nationalism. The Costeños' subversive translation of the FSLN's pedagogical material reads like a description of one of Pratt's "arts" of the contact zone: "a conquered subject using the conqueror's language to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror's own speech" (35). As a literacy contact zone, the emphases of history, orality, power, and difference negotiation are just as important in this example as with UNESCO's website. Freeland discusses the struggle between the Sandinistas and Costeños in terms of power, and a contact zone approach to literacy in this context would also highlight the coercive and counter-hegemonic contentions surrounding literacy. It would be easy to see the National Literacy Crusade as solely concerned with reading and writing. However, underlying the racist, anti-indigenous push for linguistic unity among Nicaraguans is a view of language closely connected to divergent oral and cultural contexts. Freeland points out the slippage between language, ethnicity, and culture that the call for "linguistic purity" encapsulated. A literacy contact zone framework would push us to see the oral (rather than illiterate) linguistic contexts in which such initiatives occur. The intentional double meanings in the pedagogical texts for the Costeños are examples of written *and oral* transgressions of the dominant discourse and literacy project. These materials are also an example of how such texts and discourses in a contact zone are not *either* immediate *or* wide ranging but an ongoing negotiation of both. Though the Costeños are certainly an example of a non-dominant, "grassroots" group of language speakers, this grassroots literacy campaign acts upon them bringing wider-ranging literacies and values about literacy, which they resist with targeted adaptations. A contact zone perspective on this complex situation highlights these tensions.

The literacy organization that I have spent the last four years working with takes college students from the U.S. to Haiti to work with local teachers and communities on collaborative projects. The first project I worked on with this group was to pilot a children's book initiative with kindergarten through second-grade instructors in central Haiti. The books were intended to provide affordable teaching materials, which are sorely needed throughout much of Haiti, and to specifically support students' reading in Haitian Creole (or Kreyòl). This final example of an immediate context for literacy contact zones highlights a prolonged contention about language and literacy and is the backdrop for my own research on literacy organizations. The language and literacy situation in Haiti further pushes for greater interrogation of seemingly positive language policies—such as those proposed by UNESCO—amidst complicated historical circumstances. Kreyòl is the language spoken by at least ninety percent of Haiti's population. However, French maintains its status as the language of power both explicitly in its use in official and administrative documents and through its continued prestige and privilege. Haitian schools teach French literacy alongside Kreyòl beginning in primary school. The complexity of the school language debates is evident when proponents on both sides

claim to foster empowerment for speakers of Haitian Creole. Yves Dejean is an outspoken advocate of ridding the school system of French education because Kreyòl is the "native language" and is "spoken by everyone born and raised in Haiti" (204-05). He lists reasons for this stance: that it is not very realistic to implement an effective bilingual education program in Haiti (indeed, this has not proven successful in the past); that Haiti is vastly monolingual in Kreyòl; and that there will still be enough people fluent in French to allow for international communication—this is certainly the case now in spite of under-supported French instruction.[6] Alternatively, Valerie Youssef proposes that more effective bilingual instruction is desirable because children are adept at learning languages, two languages are better than one, and Haitians themselves see French as advantageous (188). Are Haitian Creole speakers more "empowered" emphasizing Kreyòl as the language of power and rejecting the French language of their former colonizers? Or are they more empowered by having access to high-quality instruction in both French and Kreyòl? Conversely, is rejecting French as a language of instruction denying Haitian students the ability to acquire a beneficial second language, or is teaching French reinforcing the elitist and even colonial anti-creole language attitudes? In Haiti, literacy's wide-ranging associations are instantly complicated by a simple question: which literacy?

Here again we can see interrelated literacies and oralities immersed in power dynamics akin to, and even literally amidst, a contact zone. The wide-ranging elements in Haiti are the international French language as well as the abstract value of literacy that fuels academic and nonacademic attention to Haitian literacy. These two wide-ranging components are at odds, however, because of the overwhelming oral, Haitian Creole setting. We can also see from this more immediate context that beliefs about literacy, while dependent on context, still maintain literacy myths. Parents and teachers in Haiti speak of literacy as reducing crime and poverty. As Youssef notes, Haitians want to learn French as well. These are certainly clashes and negotiations between immediate and wide-ranging literacies and oralities, and we must be careful to attend to the specific configurations of power within these dynamics.

Conclusion

Literacy studies scholarship is rich in models and methodologies for investigating literacy. Scholars in composition are also adapting and extending literacy studies concepts, such as Daniel Keller's case study examination of Brandt's idea of the "acceleration" of literacy and reading practices among incoming college students. The examples of literacy contact zone analyses I provided focus on historical and rhetorical analysis, but literacy researchers from a variety of disciplines and methodologies, including composition, can benefit from using contact zones as a conceptual framework for examining literacy. Ethnographic, educational, linguistic, sociological, and other social science methodologies also stand to gain from focusing on the contexts that contact zones (and literacy studies scholarship) foreground: history, orality, language difference, and power. Composition studies research extends the view of the contact zone concept into instructional settings, enabling practice as well as analysis through the lens of a contact zone. Even so, compositionists can also reconsider contact zones as a concrete concept that calls attention to the contexts that literacy

studies research holds as valuable. Literacy contact zones offer not a new way of viewing literacy but a framework for enacting the rigorous contextualization of literacy that literacy and composition studies encourage. Contact zones offer a much-needed backdrop for literacy studies to consider immediate, wide ranging, and the messy combination of these literacy and oral practices and values. Moving beyond over-distinguishing features such as orality, literacy, local, and global, contact zones enable the complexities and interrelations between these components of literacy to be visible.

NOTES

[1] Barton's "ecological" literacy is perhaps the closest model to literacy contact zones. With it, Barton proposed: "Rather than isolating literacy activities from everything else in order to understand them, an ecological approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history, in language and in learning" (32). Ecological literacy is a metaphor for contexts that are key to understanding literacy. This biological metaphor sheds light on literacy in "everyday" settings but with an attendant (and potentially problematic) emphasis on such contexts and interactions as natural. Even with Barton's connection to ecological "diversity" and "competition," I view contact zones as highlighting exchanges in a way that avoids construing language and literacy situations as idyllic and detached from social construction.

In *Imagining Literacy*, Ramona Fernandez offered "[a]n associative model for literacy" with the Deleuze and Guattari-inspired "rhizome" as the metaphor for literacy (187). Fernandez also sought to break away from divides between "literacy/illiteracy, literacy/orality, reading, writing/misreading, even speaking/silence" to introduce "paradox" into discussions of literacy (186, 187). This project captures a radical anti-hegemonic view of literacy, which follows critical literacy theorist Elspeth Stuckey in demanding a departure from normative and prescriptive views of literacy that reinforce dominant ideologies and privileges. The framework of contact zones has a more modest aim to expose unequal distributions of power as one central context for literacy. Unlike both Barton and Fernandez's constructions, a contact zone framework steers away from metaphors to offer a more concrete characterization of literacy in its various contentious contexts.

In a similar critical literacy vein as Fernandez, Jan Blommaert proposed grassroots literacy as a lens through which to view the literacies and textual artifacts of non-dominant speakers and writers. The aim of *Grassroots Literacy* appears to be inclusion, but I find the separation of "grassroots literacy" from other more mainstream literacies as well as the reading approaches Blommaert offers for encountering such texts to be rather hierarchical. Power works in and through literacy, especially in post-colonial contexts like the ones in Blommaert's monograph. A contact zone framework seeks to attend to these dynamics by foregrounding the linguistic contexts, which exist because of power, history, orality, and language differences with their accompanying language ideologies.

[2] Street introduced the autonomous model of literacy as the misuse of literacy in several ways: it is a model "based on the 'essay-text' form of literacy," it tends to "generalise broadly from what is in fact a narrow, culture-specific literacy practice," it "assumes a single direction in which literacy development can be traced," it "attempts to distinguish literacy from schooling," and "[i]t isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences" (1-2). These multiple fallacies can be attributed to lack of attention to particular contexts, and Street countered them with his own analysis to show more context-bound meanings for different literacies in the northern Iranian village of Cheshmeh. There Street found literacy closely tied to "a social construction of reality embedded in collective practice in specific social situations" (12).

[3] Readers may be interested to know that the person I was interviewing invited me to meet her mother during the week I spent interviewing in southern Haiti. After being shunned by her potential and current employers, the mother sold much of what she inherited from her family, namely cattle and land, to send her children to school. Her oldest daughter, the teacher I interviewed, had been successful as a teacher and was named "assistant principal" at her school. When we traveled over a nearby mountain to see her mother, she was meeting with two other older women who were learning to read and write in Haitian Creole and French with a volunteer teacher from a nearby school.

[4] Terminology for discussing literacy in immediate contexts and wider-ranging ones is fraught,

so I use "immediate" or "targeted" and "wide-" or "wider-ranging" to emphasize the relativity of such distinctions. For comparison, Brandt and Clinton refer to these as "local" and "translocal" elements of literacy. Street calls them local and "distant" ("The Limits").

⁵ I understand language ideology as Woolard and Schieffelin describe:

> The new direction in research on linguistic ideology has also moved away from seeing ideology as a homogenous cultural template, now treating it as *a process involving struggles among multiple conceptualizations and demanding the recognition of variation and contestation within a community as well as contradictions within individuals.* (71; emphasis added)

⁶ For example, the standard curriculum for primary schools is in French, even though primary school is supposed to begin instruction in Kreyòl literacy and then move to French.

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Contingent Labor and the Impact on Teaching: Thoughts about the Indianapolis Resolution

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I signed the Indianapolis Resolution, of course. In my ten years as a WPA, I was keenly aware every day of the exploitation of the forty or so part-timers in my program. I did what I could to improve their lives by trying to give them their preferred schedules and by lowering class size across the board in my program to, in effect, reduce their workloads. I wrote about class size in a way meant to give other WPAs a resource to use in discussions with administrators about contingent faculty, class size, and workload. So I have been raising my voice in support of contingent faculty for a while and support the Indianapolis proposal. But from a pedagogical standpoint, the problem with the abuse of contingent faculty hinges to some degree on their lack of time to engage in professional development, an issue that the Resolution does not specifically address. In section B on pedagogy, I would add a #2A with phrasing something like this: "Develop standards for paid professional development to include training in key areas related to literacy development, such as working with English Language Learners, improving student reading, creating appropriate classroom environments, and similar matters." In support of the resolution, I propose this supplement to address the need for paid professional development for contingent teachers for five specific reasons.

First, professional development should be paid work for everyone, but especially for contingent faculty. They are poorly paid for the most part and always pressed for time. The life of part-timers is difficult, to say the least: trying to make enough money for food, shelter, and clothing, never mind supporting a family, often teaching two or three or more sections of writing at two or three different places. To do a decent job, be prepared for class, keep up with grading, and so on, there are just not enough hours in the week. And while we might want to think professionals can do all the work, they are surely not going to attend professional development sessions without compensation because there simply is not enough time. All workers are stretched these days, but contingent writing teachers especially so. And while a case can be made for professional development as a reasonable expectation for full-time faculty members, these faculty should be paid, also, for professional development sessions.

A second reason for my proposed supplement to the Resolution is the need for contingent faculty to be better prepared to work with the students coming to post-secondary education of all kinds (community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, certificate programs, online programs, and others). Additional paid professional development should address a variety of needs that contingent faculty might have: dealing with students with disabilities, supporting English Language Learners, constructing effective syllabi, managing the classroom, and, as I have argued elsewhere repeatedly, improving students' reading. On this last issue, the latest data from NAEP for twelfth graders, from

2013 (the most recent data available on high school seniors), for example, shows that 38% of high school seniors are proficient in reading. Those students are coming to our first-year writing classes this fall. Will the Common Core State Standards make a difference to this number? One can only hope that might be true. Meanwhile, as the saying goes, we have to deal with the students in front of us, and the majority of them are poor readers. There is ample "big" data and qualitative data about the reading problem. It is not getting better and this problem will not go away any time soon. The impact on students' writing is abundantly clear. And while reading is decidedly NOT "sexy" or slick because there's no easy hi-tech solution to the problem, it is an issue that can and should be addressed in writing classes. All instructors need to be able to integrate intensive and extensive reading work into their classes to address students' reading difficulties.

However, a third reason why there should be paid professional development for contingent faculty (and everyone else, as I have already said) is that even those with PhDs and MAs in Rhetoric and Composition or Writing Studies do not have much, if any, training in English as a second language, in disability support, in reading pedagogy and these other issues. They can use help knowing how to tap into campus resources such as an extant common book program, or how to team up with librarians to help students read more efficiently and effectively, or the ways that disabilities might affect student success. And sure, centers for teaching excellence are meant to offer this kind of help, but the time commitment may not be doable without compensation. Can writing programs bring in experts who know something about these matters to do workshops and provide this background and strategies that instructors can take into the classroom? Sure! Do they? Not as much as is needed. So the Indianapolis Resolution opens the door to improved professional development that really can help students succeed.

What both full-time and part-time teachers need are strategies they can use in the classroom, so this is a fourth reason for adding my supplemental language to the Resolution. Monday morning approaches that integrate reading and/or these other issues with writing instruction can make a real difference to student outcomes. For example, if you consider that according to the US Department of Education, half of those who start any kind of post-secondary education never finish, and if you put that statistic next to the weak reading skills of high school seniors, it's easy to see that reading might be contributing to our poor levels of post-secondary degree completion. So what is needed is not just any professional development, but really focused professional development, paid and mandatory, for the legions of contingent faculty who teach writing. The workshops or programs should provide Monday morning approaches that teachers can use immediately. Such programs would allow faculty develop the skills to deal with the array of issues in their daily work. In particular, teachers should be taught how to recognize students with disabilities, language disorders, or Generation 1.5 English Language Learners (whose spoken language might be quite proficient but who have serious difficulties when writing) who could benefit from tutorials or other interventions. Contingent faculty do not need to be experts, but they do need the kind of training that paid professional development can provide, to identify these kinds of problems and direct students to resources on or off campus.

Some instructors, both full- and part-time, will raise objections to a professional development focus on reading and other issues, saying they don't have time to attend to any of these problems

when there is so much to do with students' writing. In my various recent books and articles, I have tried to show that the best way to improve students' writing IS to work specifically on their reading because it is a high priority problem for more than half of the students in the average classroom. I'm not the only one who thinks this way, as a range of recent publications makes clear (Carillo; Keller; Jolliffe and Goering; Salvatori and Donahue; Sullivan et al.). One particularly clear example appears in a 2012 piece by Chris Anson and Robert Schwegler on reading in peer review. Their findings show that there is a need for better reading to enhance what happens during peer exchanges. This commonly used classroom practice is hardly the only one where focused instruction on reading could really enhance students' writing performance and their success in writing classes, in college, and in their lives as professionals and citizens, so this is a fifth reason why I support the Resolution but think specific supplemental language on professional development is needed.

It should be clear that the Indianapolis Resolution opens the door to helping improve the lives of contingent faculty. But to help them work more effectively, be paid fairly, and be treated professionally, we need to address their ability to work with all students, whether they need help with reading or on some other issue that interferes with developing their writing abilities. Contingent faculty should be compensated appropriately for professional development work that would provide useful background in areas such as reading, among other topics not part of the usual grad school preparation, like working with students with disabilities. But in addition to background, faculty members should be equipped with specific strategies they can take directly into their classrooms. Understanding useful strategies for the classroom will allow them to provide writing instruction that yields a stronger curriculum across the board.

I signed the Indianapolis Resolution, and I really hope it becomes a working document in our field. It should be widely distributed and supported by all of our major professional organizations. It should be presented to administrators, accrediting bodies, and other professional organizations, including the AAUP and other national groups. It needs to advocate specific steps that should be taken to improve the working conditions and the work of contingent faculty. As all faculty face students with a broad array of needs and challenges, including widespread reading difficulties, paid professional development can improve faculty efficacy in the classroom. As part of this effort, I hope the Resolution can be supplemented in the way I have suggested here so it can serve as a tool for improving the teaching and learning of writing to help every student succeed.

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Book Review   *The Rise of Writing:*
Redefining Mass Literacy, by Deborah Brandt

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In her new book *The Rise of Writing*, Deborah Brandt takes on an ambitious task: to examine the changing ways that people engage with writing in the twenty-first century and construct a new understanding of mass literacy from that examination. "For the first time in history," Brandt notes, "masses of humans have keyboards under their hands that connect them to people at a distance and screens that shine back at them the public look of their own written words" (159). Writing through the eyes of her many research subjects, Brandt shows the shifts in mass literacy, the forces that have built those shifts, and the complex ramifications of them in ways that will be useful for future writing researchers and writing teachers.

Brandt's new work emerges from her earlier work on sponsors of literacy; in *Literacy in American Lives*, she argues that the literacy development of individuals is "sponsored" by larger social forces that shape what kinds of learning students engage in when it comes to writing, what kinds of writing they do not engage in, and the purposes for which such writing is used. In *The Rise of Writing*, Brandt carries her project forward to identify the effects of sponsors not only on individual literacy learning but on the collective, substantial shifts in literacy development in the twenty-first century. The text, organized into four chapters bookended by an introduction and conclusion, tackles the status of writing in the twenty-first century, the trials and tribulations of writing for the state, and the role of writing literacy (and sponsors of writing literacy) for contemporary young adults. Through these different foci, Brandt is able to use her interview data to break open complex issues of ownership, representation, and the role of the writer (and writing) in society in order to build a theory of literacy situated in writing and "in tune with the communicative arrangements of our time" (126).

Brandt's findings emerge from a collection of interviews with people whose jobs involved writing at least 15% of the time on a daily basis. During the interviews, Brandt's subjects served as "witnesses to socio-historical change" (8). Through the witnessing power of her subjects, Brandt is able to address a variety of important issues: the ways in which writing in the twenty-first century is pulling mass literacy in new directions, the moral and habitual growth that occurs via mass writing literacy, the emergence of writing as a primary form of twenty-first century work, the inter-institutional shaping of "workaday" (26) writing into something both socially invisible and individually meaningful, and the status of writing as well as the ways in which it situates people. These issues coalesce, in her text, around the concept of the rise of mass writing literacy in the US, as well as the social forces that have worked and are working to sponsor that rise.

At the heart of this study is the "[g]ritty vocational heritage of writing and its association with work, competition, artisanship, commercialism, apprenticeship, performance, and publicity" (127), a heritage sponsored by forces much different from the sponsors of mass reading literacy. This difference is important for Brandt; it leads her to locate significant writing development in the lives

of her interview subjects outside of traditional school experiences: in special interest writing, in activism, in the everyday work of many twenty-first century occupations. Writing, Brandt argues, is "worldly work" (97); that is, it is grounded in, and emerges from, the daily activity of people attempting to get by in the world and, as a result of that worldiness, it often seems dissociated from the sponsors of literacy supporting mass reading. Mass writing's surge into prominence, in fact, causes reading (as well as the sponsors of literacy that support specific kinds of reading) to fall back, becoming a tool to shape writing rather than something that is encountered with and understood through writing.

Brandt traces the differences in writing and reading sponsors to the historical development of mass reading and writing in the West. The complex histories from which reading and writing literacies emerge have shaped these literacies in problematic ways. Older social arrangements of culture—when readers far outnumbered writers—have created an approach to thinking about reading and writing literacies in ways that do not accurately account for how writing and reading are used in the twenty-first century. Brandt asks, "Is it possible to contemplate a mass literacy based on new relationships between writing and reading such that how and why we write will condition how and why we read? Is it possible—indeed necessary—to contemplate new approaches to literacy based primarily in writing?" (159). The answer to these questions, Brandt argues, is yes. The task that Brandt takes up in her work is to trace out a framework for such an approach to literacy. Using sponsors of literacy as a driving concept, along with a methodology for identifying sponsors of literacy within her interviews, helps Brandt realize the value of workplaces as engines of literacy production and, in particular, as engines of *writing* literacy production. The rise of workplaces as sponsors of literacy— what Brandt refers to as the second stage of mass literacy in the US—turns writing into a form of labor, something with complex social consequences.

The rise of writing and, particularly, the sponsoring of writing as a form of labor, enmeshes the act of writing within 21st century understandings of labor. Because it is so caught up as a form of labor, the value of writing is transformed through different industry demands. What Brandt refers to as *workaday* writing is often transformative for individuals and yet, at the same time, not considered intellectual labor of the same level as literature. Writing for the state, for private companies, or even ghostwriting allows individuals to understand their world and their place in it, yet the writing that actually comes of those situations is not "theirs," but rather in the possession of the state, company, or individual for whom these individuals write. The literate efforts of these individuals are, in essence, rendered invisible by the organizational structures of our time.

These workplace literacy sponsors, though enabling mass writing literacy in a seemingly invisible manner, still enable what Brandt refers to as an era of *deep writing*, when "more and more people write for prolonged periods of time from deeply inside interactive networks and in immersive cognitive states, driven not merely by the orchestration of memory, muscle, language, and task but by the effects that writing can have on others and the self" (160). Deep writing, with its hallmarks of consequentiality, drama, and complicatedness, occurs when individuals orient themselves to extensive writing tasks that require the reorientation of other literate activity—such as reading—in order to construct a desired written product. This shift, from reading to Brandt's definition of *deep*

writing, carries with it myriad limits and possibilities, possible strengths and serious issues stemming from the troubled past of the sponsors of literacy who enable such a shift.

Brandt's approach to addressing the rise of mass writing is useful for multiple audiences. The concept of sponsors of literacy, as well as the greater narrative within which those sponsors fit, sheds useful light on the changing processes through which literacies are picked up by writers over time. *The Rise of Writing* unveils a clash of sponsoring forces in the literate development of individuals, and that clash is leading to dynamically different literacy understanding and uptake over time. Brandt's identification and explanation of these changes—and the theory that she subsequently develops— makes her work useful for teachers of writing, literacy researchers, and researchers interested in writing development. Furthermore, this text can be useful for individuals looking to examine their own development retrospectively as literate participants in society, as the shifts in mass literacy that Brandt describes are nothing less than tectonic and have shaped (and will continue to shape) the literate activity of the readers of this text just as surely as it has influenced her research subjects. As researchers in writing studies, literacy studies, and K-20 education take their work further into the 21st century, they can and should use *The Rise of Writing* as one of the key texts to navigating the constantly-changing literate waters they are working in.

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